

THE PARASITE



HELEN
REIMENSNYDER
MARTIN

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THE PARASITE
A NOVEL

THIRD EDITION



BUT SUDDENLY HE CALLED, "TANTE JOAN!"

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A NOVEL

BY

HELEN REIMENSNYDER MARTIN

AUTHOR OF "TILLIE, A MENNONITE MAID," "THE CROSSWAYS,"
"THE FIGHTING DOCTOR," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG



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THE PARASITE

PART I

I

FROM his advantageous point of view on the piazza Arthur Randall, musingly observant, could overlook the lawn where the summer guests of his sister, Mrs. McCord, were gathered for five o'clock tea, and he found himself uncommonly interested in watching the pairs or groups scattered about under the beautiful old trees or in the few weather-worn summer-houses that dotted the wide green space, while a negro butler and two maids in trim black and white served tea, cake, and daintily thin sandwiches. Interested? Well, so long as they let him alone and did not insist upon including him as part of the scene. To contemplate this domestic and social picture was, he said to himself, to consider, really, a large area of life which it typified, the graceful, esthetically-gowned women representing the whole class of leisure-loving, pleasure-seeking, non-producing feminine parasites of modern society; the comfortable, well-groomed, well-fed men standing for the conservatism which finds present conditions so satisfactory (to its own class) that its face is set with invincible resolution against any change or "progress" which would in the least disturb its well-being or its power.

In one respect, however, he reflected, the group before him was not typically modern; there was not present here, nor ever would be at his conservative sister's old southern home, any representative of the *nouveau riche* hordes who in these days so successfully scaled the ramparts which of old had guarded inherited rank from the aggressions of vulgar money-makers. Money-making had a social value now-a-days that it had not had in the past. In a few localities, however, society still seemed able to hold itself aloof from the depredations of "upstarts"—among them, notably, the old city in Maryland which for one hundred and fifty years had been the home of Arthur Randall's forbears and which was famous throughout the State for its generations of distinguished, exclusive, and genuinely superior society; a society which had given to the State three governors, two United States senators, one eminent judge and two "delightful" novelists. Strangely enough, its "great" men had all come from its "old families"—which in the minds of the old families was an irrefutable argument (in spite of numerous American examples to the contrary) in favor of keeping "pure" their blood. All of which, to our much-travelled young Judge Arthur Randall, had its humorous aspect by contrast with the deeply intrenched and more justifiable caste of the older countries across the water.

"Beechlands," as his sister's summer home was named, was an old colonial stone mansion on Chesapeake Bay, five miles from the aforesaid distinguished Maryland city. Most of the old families of this city had their summer homes out here on the Bay, the distance from the city

making just a pleasant automobile ride, for the men of the families, to and from their offices. So that, during no part of the year could these choice people escape from each other. Not that they wished to—being complacently unaware of their need of contact with fresh, new life, and serenely unconscious of the mediævalism of their opinions, or rather prejudices, on most things in the universe. This, at least, was the view of them held by Judge Randall, detached, as he felt himself, temperamentally and intellectually, from his elder sister's world, in spite of the fact that it had been his world, too, all his life long—the difference being that in his case its influences had been counteracted or supplemented by travel; and by that other wider universe created for him from his omnivorous reading, in which, indeed, he did really live and move and have his essential being.

“I see you have your old school friend, Madam Amy Tyson, here, haven't you?—and her daughter,” he remarked to his sister, who, upon his appearing on the piazza fifteen minutes ago, had, as soon as possible, left her guests to greet him, for he had but just arrived from Eastport for the week-end.

Something of the innate fineness of this young Southern gentleman of blood and culture had been at once manifest in the subtly exquisite courtesy with which he had risen to meet his sister and make her comfortable in an easy chair in the shade.

Mrs. McCord's devotion to her brother, six years younger than herself, hardly less deep than her love for her own two grown sons, had never been shaken through

all the shock and strain, upon her profoundly conventional soul, of his radicalism not only in thought but in deed, and of his one terrible misstep, taken four years ago, to the very brink of ruin.

A plain, small, dark woman of forty, of insignificant appearance, there was yet an air about her, a native dignity, that set her apart as of no common stock. Reserved and rather cold in manner, there was nevertheless in her bearing towards those she cared for a graciousness, an undemonstrative tenderness, that made them in turn almost worship her. Her friendships, limited in kind and number, were not superficial, but vital and life-long. Her prejudices, ingrained in the fibre of her, were unshaken by travel, by reading, by experience. True to herself and sincere in every relation in life, she was a strange compound of nobility, fineness, narrowness, and ignorance.

Unlike his sister, Judge Randall was tall and of very substantial build, though he had what was known in his county as "the Randall cameo features." In his boyhood and early manhood he had been rather ashamed of being so good-looking; in later years more serious troubles had overshadowed this lighter affliction. The rather excessive refinement of his features, however, did not counteract their strength, for his really splendid head, his gray eyes with their extraordinarily clear, deep light, gave him, with his fine physique, an arresting look of power, both physical and spiritual—a power which, at the age of thirty-four, had not only landed him, through the practice of the law, on the Supreme Bench of his State, but had made him its foremost citizen. Nor was this look of power dimin-

ished by the unmistakable melancholy of his countenance, the mark set upon him by the tragic experience of four years ago, an experience which had left him, while still so young a man, embittered, cynical, spiritually frozen, save for one live coal which still burned in his otherwise torpid heart.

"It is so odd, isn't it, to see babyish little Amy Tyson with a grown daughter!" his sister answered his query, smiling, as she sipped her tea. "And Catherine looks such a huge girl beside her dainty small mother, doesn't she?"

"She's a handsome young animal, by Jupiter!" replied Randall, who was given at times to a vigorous bluntness of speech which seemed oddly at variance with his old-fashioned courtliness of manner and "the Randall cameo features"—as though a strain of primeval savagery in him revolted at its long enslavement to civilization.

"What a way to speak of a girl!" Mrs. McCord affectionately protested, her shining countenance and her whole attitude towards her brother betraying her pride in and adoration of him.

"That's *all* she is, Sally."

"Oh, no, dear! Why, how could Catherine Tyson be anything else than exquisite in every way, with such blood as she has?—and such an unmistakable look of race! And as you've not seen her since she was a child, you can't possibly *know* such a dreadful thing as you said!"

"There, there, I didn't mean what you suppose. What, by the way," he demanded with a short laugh, "*do* you suppose?"

"You imply that she is coarse!"

"If she satisfies your hypersevere standards, my dear, as to what a young girl ought to be, she's indeed a model of propriety. I'll admit that on your word without proof!"

"But what led you to think, as you so brutally remarked, dear, that she's an 'animal'?"

"Therein, I suspect, lies her only value. It is a value of a kind. She's well-rounded, soft and cool and smooth and beautiful. A prize-animal, too, as to breeding—nothing left to desire in that line. Her spiritual values, however, are, I should judge, purely negative. She's merely not anything she ought not to be."

"Oh, Arthur! Catherine Tyson is one of the most positive characters I've ever known! Wait until you've talked with her just two minutes! I can't think where you *see* what you say!" she cried, really puzzled as she followed the direction of his gaze across the lawn to where the very beautiful and rather haughty looking young woman in question sipped tea as she lounged in a deep willow chair, with Mrs. McCord's eldest son sprawled on the grass at her feet.

"Can you imagine, Sally, that truly elegant looking girl doing anything worth doing? She's the most relaxed individual I ever saw! Just look at her—repose in every muscle; absolute repose."

"That is her charm, Arthur—the charm that stamps her for what she so pre-eminently *is*—a gentlewoman."

"Exactly. The culmination of generations of cultiva-

tion; the ripe fruit followed by the tree's stagnation; the beautiful autumn hue preceding decay."

"What nonsense you talk, dear!"

"She's worse than her futile mother! Your friend Amy, I remember, was never known to finish anything she'd begun, from a piece of embroidery to a magazine story—and had a way of going about dropping things—her sewing, her magazine, her jewelry, any old thing!—but this daughter of hers, I surmise, would not go so far as to *begin* anything!"

"You're mistaken! She's not only a very efficient girl, with a strong will and plenty of common sense—she's her mother's right-hand man. Poor little Amy looks up to her big daughter in awe and takes her advice about everything."

"Yes—yes," he dismissed the subject indifferently, "I should judge the girl to be quite a personality;" and though his sister could not reconcile this admission with his not recanting his aspersions as to her "negative" quality, she was so used to her inability to make Arthur's inconsistencies hang together, that she usually did not try. "A strong personality gone to waste," he added reflectively. "Might have amounted to something if she had not been born an heiress to a great fortune."

"Not gone to waste," his sister demurred. "She fills her proper place beautifully and will continue to fill and grace it all her life, I am sure! You'll change your opinion when you talk to her. Amy, by the way," she remarked, with a little indulgent laugh for the folly of her frivolous old school friend, "has been lauding you

to Catherine to such a degree that I'm afraid she's inspired the poor girl with a mortal aversion to you! which, however," she added reassuringly, "she'll of course get over quickly enough when she sees and knows you."

"Gods, Sally! If I'd known you had all these people here, even my homesickness for my boy would not have tempted me to spend the week-end here! I'd have had Bappis come to *me* over Sunday," he said, and it was noticeable how even a casual mention of his little son softened the hard lines of his face. "Why didn't you warn me?"

"The truth is I wanted you to meet Catherine Tyson. I think she has bloomed out so beautifully."

"But why should you want me to meet her?"

Leaning sidewise against the arm of her chair to bring herself nearer to him, she answered confidentially, "Dear! I see no reason why you should not find happiness again!"

A slight astonishment stirred the rather stony serenity which was habitual with him. "'Happiness?' 'Find' it with Catherine Tyson? Sally!" He turned a speculative gaze upon her. "How my life has revolutionized your views if you can be plotting for me matrimonially!"

"My views are what they've always been. I'm not given to changing my views with every new book I read as *you* seem to do, dearie! But your experience," she added, coloring sensitively at touching upon the sore and hateful subject, "is simply too exceptional to come under ordinary rules."

"From present appearances I should be cutting out your Ned, my dear!" he shrugged his square shoulders.

"Not only Ned, but all the young men of the neighborhood! Catherine has them all at her feet. And she is so beautifully indifferent!"

"She can afford to be," he granted. "And," he placidly added, "she can continue to be, for me."

"I have never known a woman to be indifferent to you, Arthur, if you thawed enough to notice her."

"That's *your* view of your wonderful brother! But, Sally," he added a bit coldly, "don't waste yourself plotting matrimony for me! Even if I were not incapable (after what I've been through) of caring for a woman enough to marry her—do you forget that there's Bappis—and—and Laura?"

"*She* is not to be considered!" his sister—her color deepening—hastily replied; and it was evident that both she and Randall shrank before this redoubtable theme, though Mrs. McCord's look and tone showed also that she could hate as strongly as she could love.

"You must know that most women," Randall insisted, his face gone a shade pale, "would have a prejudice against marrying me while Laura lives—not to mention Bappis."

"Most women of to-day have no prejudice whatever against marrying a divorced man when he is—well, the kind of man you are—good-looking, charming, reasonably well-off, and with a rising reputation!"

"You strangely overlook the fact that any woman who considered me would at least want to know the cause of my divorce!"

"We could certainly satisfy her on that score," she

quickly answered, though her tone was by no means so confident as her words.

"If she could be too easily satisfied, she'd hardly be a woman I'd place over Bappis. And he's another impediment, of course, to my thinking of marrying."

"It's for his sake you'll have to marry. It's the only solution of the Bappis problem. Bappis must have a mother, a home."

"A step-mother?"

"He couldn't drive away a step-mother as he does every nurse and housekeeper you employ. You, too, need a home, Arthur, which you've found you can't have without a mistress for it. There isn't anything you have not *tried* in the way of housekeepers, from reduced gentlewomen to negro mammies! The reduced gentlewomen were the worst, weren't they? I don't see what's left for you but matrimony. You'd be much more comfortable!"

"And you actually imagine that my marrying that luxurious, seductive maiden out yonder would find Bappis less motherless than he is now? Ha!" he laughed almost sardonically, a quick fire in his eyes. "Believe me, I shall protect my boy from such a fate as that! Why, I'd as soon give him for a step-mother that other young parasite I see you still have hanging on here—that impecunious distant cousin of your husband who's always sponging on you—what's her name? The demure looking girl that's pouring tea out yonder."

"Joan? Yes, she's still 'hanging on.' She always does until I tell her I need her room for a few weeks

and present her with a mileage book to go to another distant cousin's. But, poor child, what else is she to do?"

"Work for her living. She'd far better, than work so hard at being a parasite."

"Hubert offered her a position once in his office, but she didn't seem to want it. She, and her mother, too, I understand, have a mortal dread of sinking in the social scale through their poverty. That's why she hangs on so desperately here and elsewhere. But we don't mind having her. She's so unobtrusive, one hardly knows she's about. Now *there's* a 'negative' individual—talking about 'negative' people. But young as she is, she's nevertheless rather useful here. She tries to be, so that she may have more of a foothold, you know; I always find when she has gone that I miss the odds and ends she's constantly doing for me, though I confess I don't miss her conversation or any other brilliant quality!"

"A sycophant too, poor worm! The worst of *her* is (as I happened to learn recently) that her poor delicate mother does work for a living—and very hard too—to keep this Joan in finery for her round of visits! Rather base of the girl, I say, Sally!"

"But what does her mother *do*?" Sally inquired, astonished. "I never met her but once, and then she seemed to me to have even less back-bone than Joan. I don't see how she could ever earn a dollar! I've often wondered how Joan managed to dress so well on the little they must certainly have. But of course if her mother helps out by working! Do you know what she *does*?"

He laughed. "Writes verses and 'sentiments' for

valentines and birthday cards. Sometimes she sells them and sometimes she does not. A young lawyer of Annapolis whom she recently employed to collect a bad debt on commission from one of these valentine publishers asked my advice, and, when he found I knew who she was, he confided to me that her case was pathetic; that she spent every dollar she earned on her 'society daughter,' as he called this Joan, and nearly starved herself."

"Oh, but, Arthur, I can't think Joan is such a wretch! She is really a very sweet girl."

"Sally, dear, the way you can't see flaws in your friends!—even in your caitiff of a brother! Well, it's a very amiable trait, sister! As for Joan Laird's mother—I saw her myself for a few minutes in her lawyer's office, and she seemed to me a frail little wreck of a woman. It's a shame for the girl to prey upon her! She ought instead to be taking care of her!"

"Of course she ought! But about Bappis, Arthur—he does need a step-mother! For you know you are really foolish about your boy! It *isn't* wise for you to forbid his being disciplined—*effectually* disciplined—by those who have the care of him. It has got to the point, dear, when neither servants nor relatives can stand it—though I hate to say such unpleasant things to you!" she pleaded.

"My 'foolishness' about my boy, Sally, is my one saving grace—the raft to which I've clung ever since he was born, to save myself from being submerged entirely!"

"But your love ought not to blind you to his welfare, Arthur, dear."

"It is my love which I trust to guide me in the matter of his welfare."

"I admit it does guide you in your *own* dealings with him, for when you are by you certainly do make him behave himself. But the moment you are gone—well!" she gasped, "it's battle, murder and sudden death!—war, pestilence and famine!—for the rest of us!"

For three reasons Judge Randall never took his sister's complaints of his son so seriously as he might otherwise have done; first, he did not share her conviction that a well-behaved child is a cowed child; secondly, her deep and bitter resentment against the child's mother (once her loved friend whom, had the offending husband been any one but her idolized brother, Sally would have considered outrageously sinned against rather than sinning) made it impossible for her to feel affection for the boy that so strongly resembled the hated woman who had refused forgiveness to Arthur Randall; thirdly, Arthur junior (or "Bappis" as his father had always called him, after his infant effort to pronounce the capital city Annapolis) was too decided a character to get on peaceably with so dominating a personality as his Aunt Sally. Arthur, senior, himself, got on with her only by never contradicting her or arguing with her if he could avoid it. Assertive people, unless their assertions took the form of her own convictions, never got on with Mrs. McCord.

"I'm afraid," he gravely answered her just now, "that in leaving Bappis on your hands this summer, Sally, I am imposing on your unselfish kindness to me. But," he added, frowning back a look almost of tears, "I've been

hard-pushed to know what to do with the little man! Very hard-pushed—or I should not have afflicted you—knowing how you feel towards him—how you can't help feeling!"

"Dear!" she remorsefully laid her hand on his, "there is nothing, *nothing* too much for me to do for you! It isn't that. Only—if you would give me leave to discipline the child in my own way, when he needs it——"

Randall shook his head. "No doubt I'm unreasonable—but I can't permit it. One must love a child to be just to him—especially a child so aggressive, positive and altogether difficult as Bappis. And then, the way he is knocked about from pillar to post, and left, for the most part, to the mercy of unscrupulous and sometimes cruel servants (the latter has happened, as you know), I can't have any one 'effectually' punishing the boy for faults which are wholly the results of his unfortunate environment."

"Then," said his sister, who, for a high-strung, sensitive woman, was at times strangely obtuse, "rather than have things go on this way, you'd better, for the boy's own good, send him—to—to his mother!"

Arthur Randall bit his lip hard before he answered. He realized how this suggestion measured her growing aversion to the boy.

"That would mean, you know, that I give him up absolutely—probably never to see him again——"

"She still asks that?"

"Demands it. Thinks any contact with me polluting to her son! And I'd cut off my right hand—yes, my head—before I would part with him so absolutely!"

He rose abruptly to relieve her of her tea-cup, his face cold and set. "I see your Catherine Tyson is strolling up here—so I'll go and find Bappis. He was sleeping when I got here. He'll be having his bath by now."

"Not yet. The whole house knows it when Bappis has his bath!—because, if you please, he doesn't like his nurse; so he kicks her, floods the bath-room with water and raises Bedlam generally! The new nurse girl who came last Sunday has, by the way, given notice."

"Oh, confound her! I thought she seemed really promising. Well!" he drew a long, hard breath, "well, well! I'll go and bathe him myself. And you'll hear no noise of battle!"

He turned away, just as Catherine Tyson, followed by Ned McCord, reached the piazza steps.

"Any way," thought his sister, "I have at least succeeded in putting the marriage idea into his head. It is the only thing for him to do and I shall try my best to bring it about! He'll be much better off in every way. And I hope the step-mother he gives Bappis will be the sort Bappis needs—the sort the little tyrant can't knock down and jump on! Catherine Tyson would so perfectly fill the bill!"

II

It was no wonder that Bappis, at the age of six, was an insurgent of the first water against every form of coercion save his father's; for he had been obliged during the past four years to fight his way like a Bonaparte through a small army of well-meaning but not always wise or loving relatives and a large army of unprincipled nurse-maids; so that he had now arrived at the conviction, uncomfortable for himself and others, that every hand save his father's was against him and that the advent of a newcomer in his small world was the signal for him to battle.

Judge Randall's first sight of his little son to-day as he was undergoing the last stages of his afternoon toilet in the bath-room, the donning of a fresh white Russian blouse, gave him a startled impression of a change in his aspect, a more child-like happiness in his face, a more erect carriage of his little frame, a generally stronger, more wholesome hue from head to foot, than he had worn two weeks ago when Randall had last seen him. In view of the interview he had just had with his sister he was the more surprised. And contrary to Sally's predictions, and it must be confessed to his own questioning astonishment, he found the boy quite cheerfully submissive under his nurse's hands.

"Obber! Oh, Obber!" he greeted his father ecstatically,—this name having been his baby attempt at "Arthur," as he had been wont to hear his mother call

his father; another of those relics of his infancy which his doting father had never let him drop. "Obber, I can spell three new words that Tante Joan taught me! Here on the faucets—H-O-T, cold; C-O-L-D, hot; and here on this pipe—W-A-S-T-E—shirt-waist!" he triumphantly brought out after an instant's hesitation.

" 'Tante Joan,' Bappis? "

" Yes, she says she'll be my aunt so's we can be more intimate."

" Ah? " This was indeed an unheard-of phase—Bappis welcoming, apparently, to intimacy a would-be relative—the friendly overtures of his kin being usually repulsed with suspicion and without ceremony. What did it mean?

" But when I'm Red Wing, the Indian Chief, then she's my squaw and her name is Gold Tooth because she has a gold tooth in the back of her mouth. Oh, we have lots of fun! I like Tante Joan better than any of the other boys—except," he piously added, " of course Jesus! Obber!" he suddenly demanded anxiously, " I can stay here all summer, can't I? I have such a great time here! "

Not within his memory had Judge Randall been accosted, after a two weeks' separation from his boy, with other than a passionate pleading to be taken with his father from the place where, at the time, he happened to be sojourning.

" Is it all because of 'Tante Joan,' " he asked incredulously, " that you have such 'a great time' ? "

" Oh, yes! She always comes up with me when I have to go to bed, unless Aunt Sally needs her for some-

thing, and she tells me stories, and every morning I go to her room and get into her bed and she tells me stories again. We're very intimate. We're a tribe—an Indian tribe. *You* may join our tribe, Obber!"

"Thank you for the honor, Bappis. And if you really want to stay here, you'll have to be very careful, you know, to make no trouble for Aunt Sally. You must not fight your nurse and howl when she washes and dresses you and——"

"Yes," broke in the black nurse girl sullenly, in spite of the awe felt before her employer, "he nearly tears the clothes off of me when I take him from Miss Joan to scrub him! He won't behave unless Miss Joan will come along too and stay by while he's bein' washed. The only reason you all didn't hear him holler to-day was that Miss Joan told him if he hollered she would not tell him any yarns to-night after he was in bed. She couldn't come along up this afternoon because Mrs. McCord needed her to pour tea. And anyhow, when Mrs. McCord saw *you'd* got here, Judge, she said Miss Joan wasn't to play with Bappis so much and humor him so much while you're here—it gets him too spoilt. Oh, if it wasn't for Miss Joan's holding him down with her wheedlin' of him, I'd have left before *this*!"

"I'll be glad when you do go, you old Cassy!" retorted Bappis. "And I only act spoilt when Tante Joan *isn't* with me, not when she is! And I wish you were drowned dead!"

"Tut, tut, Bappis! Apologize to Cassy instantly—and don't let me hear you speak to her so again!"

The boy obeyed at once, glibly and perfunctorily pronouncing the oft-exacted formula of apology. He was always perfectly docile with his father. Randall had long since proved to himself that the child could be governed alone through his affections. Without actual brutality it was impossible to cow him.

"What kinds of stories does your new 'aunt' tell you?" he asked.

"Oh—h," drawled Bappis, "about Siegfried and Hiawatha and Columbus and Hercules and Perseus and George Washington and all the heroes."

"She learns him to be so wonderful intelligent!" the maid volunteered.

"Cassy," Bappis patronizingly admonished her, "you should say *teaches* him, not *learns* him."

"La, Bappis, *I* ain't one of them Four Hundred—I don't matter how *I* talk my grammar!"

Randall laughed, patted Bappis' head and presently went away to dress for dinner.

He reflected, as he shaved and dressed, upon "the wonderful ways of Providence" in turning to such good account the little parasite's efforts to so ingratiate herself with her hostess as to make herself an almost indispensable adjunct in a comfortable and even luxurious home to which she had no sort of title.

"Now why wouldn't the damsel be happier," he idly speculated, "in finding some sort of a legitimate job at governessing or even child's nursing—anything, I should think, would be better for her than this sponging around on people that don't really want her and imposing on that frail mother of hers!"

It was not, he decided, that she was incompetent, for she seemed to have an aptitude, at least, in dealing with a child—seeing how she actually governed Bappis without his knowing he was governed. And it was not that she was lazy, for no one who regularly employed her on a salary would exact half the really hard service he had seen her render voluntarily for her mere board and the tolerant, amiable contempt of those she served. She worked so very much harder eluding self-support than ever she'd have to work *at* it! It must be that she suffered from the old-fashioned Southern false pride about a woman's working for her living—but why didn't the poor little fool see that her present career manifested such a very lamentable lack of proper pride and self-respect? And she did not seem to have any false pride about her mother's working for money!

However, that her pitiable scheming to hold her insecure social place should take the form of making his forlorn little boy happier, inevitably softened his strong aversion to the type she represented.

It occurred to him that it was rather odd of Sally not to have mentioned the very useful part "Tante Joan" was playing in the redoubtable task of managing Bappis.

"She's perhaps afraid that any one able to deal with him so effectually might tempt me to marry her off-hand—to secure her as a permanent child's nurse!—especially as wedlock seems to Sally the only solution of my tribulations with servants, housekeepers and their ilk! Praise God, I don't agree with her! Not *that* solution of my troubles!"

But while his sister pleaded for a step-mother for the boy, the bride would have to be, 'Randall knew, to satisfy Sally's fastidious ambitions for her brother, of a brilliancy in their world equal at least to that of the wife who had divorced him. Yes, evidently Sally had feared to draw his attention to Joan Laird's gracious offices in behalf of Bappis. She even, according to the nurse girl, had, upon his coming to-day, prohibited those offices altogether, on the plea that Joan "spoiled" the boy.

Catherine Tyson, on the contrary, he recognized his sister's view, left nothing to be desired in the way of radiancy, for the high post of his legal mistress.

He grinned rather sardonically as the situation thus opened up before him.

III

AT dinner that evening Miss Catherine Tyson became, towards the end of the meal, vaguely conscious of the fact that she was undergoing an unprecedented experience. A brilliant career of conquests had taught her that on the part of one so inordinately, even riotously, beautiful, a studied indifference towards any male mortal who came within the radiance of her loveliness was usually all that was needed to sting and goad the poor wretch to concentrated effort at winning her coveted attention.

In the case, however, of this distinguished-looking young Judge who had taken her out to dinner, the formula did not seem to work, though she was confident that never had she looked better than in this pale green *crêpe de Paris* gown she was wearing to-night. To her own surprise she found that *his* indifference was having precisely the effect upon her which hers was not having upon him—it stung her to a desire to compel his attention to what, surely, ought at this moment to be engaging it. Why, the man seemed really more interested in his two nephews—the slangy Harvard boy, his namesake, who sat opposite him and the effeminate elder son of his sister on his left—than in her.

“Cousin Sally,” as Catherine by courtesy, and according to the quaint Southern custom, called Mrs. McCord who was not related to her, had been haranguing her son Artie (very tiresomely, Catherine thought) on his disregard

of her wishes the night before at a dance given by one of the neighboring families; she had charged both him and his elder brother, on their starting to the party, that they were not, on pain of her deep displeasure, to dance with the Popples girls—two pretty, popular and enormously rich but supposedly plebeian inhabitants of this select and exclusive community; and her younger boy had had the temerity to disobey her.

“*Why* should we be forced to meet ‘new’ people?” “Cousin Sally” had been lamenting. “Why should any of our old families here—and especially the Mitchells with such traditions as they have behind them—thrust upon us these Poppleses?—whose intrusiveness in building out here, after failing to wedge themselves into society in town, ought to be thoroughly snubbed! And,” she added, with a faint flush of repressed anger, “that one of my own sons, knowing how strongly I felt about it, should *dance* with the little upstarts!”

Clad in a low-necked black lace gown, Mrs. McCord, in her flushed indignation, looked almost handsome. The fine old room, with its white wood-work, Sheraton furniture, family portraits and glittering old silver, was a distinguished setting for her dignified presiding at the head of her beautifully appointed table.

“But, Mother,” her guilty son protested, “I had told Mollie Popples last week at the tennis match that I’d be at the dance with bells on!—and I hadn’t the ‘pep,’ after that, not to ask her for a dance. Anyway, you saw how all the fellows, except a few daisy rah-rahs like Ned,

danced with her and her sister—and I didn't want to be the only one not to have a stand-in with them."

"Boys are such sheep about girls!" remarked Ned in his high falsetto. "No sooner do they see a girl attracting a bit of attention than they all think they've got to be in it too—while another far more attractive girl may sit out every dance, simply because the tide wasn't started in her direction. You see that all the time."

"But, Mother, really," argued Artie, "the Popples *are* all to the good! No grape fruit about them, I tell you! And I'm not the bonehead to miss a trick when I've a chance with a girl like Mollie Popples!"

"Even when it means disobeying your mother?"

"Artie, go stand in the corner!" he admonished himself so absurdly that the unpleasant discussion was turned to a general laugh.

"Anyway," Artie concluded, "the 'new rich' are *always* being slammed at by the old poor! What's the good?"

"I shouldn't wonder if these Poppleses of yours, Artie," remarked Catherine, with her habitually languid and rather bored manner of speech which was curiously fascinating because absolutely natural, "are the very ones who were at our hotel in Rome last winter. Don't you remember, Mama?"

"Oh!" cried the fussy, ineffectual little mother of this tall, strong, cool maiden, "do you mean, dearest, the Mrs. Popples who told me she was going to have her daughter's portrait painted by one of the Old Masters?"

"And did she?" inquired Artie.

"Think, Sally, what fun you miss, not knowing the Poppleses!" remarked Randall.

"And I had been so sure," shrugged Catherine, "from seeing how avid they were to improve their minds at art galleries and ruins, that they were at least nothing *less* than three school teachers! It was such a come-down to find they were only *nouveau riche* millionaires. I staid away from the dance last night and insisted upon Mama's staying away because I was sure, if they *were* those Poppleses, they'd be impertinent enough to claim acquaintance with us, and use it as an excuse for calling here and annoying Cousin Sally."

"Don't you think it!" cried Artie. "I can't speak for the mother, but I know the two girls aren't such ivory tops!"

"If only you'd speak English, Artie! What, may I ask, are we to understand by an ivory top?" protested his mother.

"Bonehead. Ivory Dome. As it were, stupid."

"All you seem to learn at Harvard is a very complete vocabulary of slang and a lack of respect for your mother!"

"And she doesn't see," Judge Randall reflected as he sipped his wine, "that the son she can't dominate is going to make twice the man that her obedient Ned will ever be. And Ned would be twice the man he is if he had ever been encouraged to be himself. But 'live and let live' was never *Sally's* motto!"

"Now I should think, you know," he suddenly remarked with a smile that was half ironic, half enigmatic, "that people like you all who, by virtue of your inherited

superiority, can *afford* to risk contact with a lower order without danger of being damaged (I am speaking for you all, not for the lower order)—that you would eagerly welcome the diversion of a new and different element into your world. Exclusive, conservative society is inevitably dull society.”

“You will admit, however, Uncle Arthur,” Ned observed, “that conservative society has at least the advantage of being dignified and elegant society.”

“Yes—if dignity and elegance are sufficient compensations for stupidity.”

“Oh! Thanks!” Catherine drawled, turning slightly towards him.

But, as though he had not heard her, he continued: “If we are a superior class, why keep our superiority to ourselves? Why not philanthropically give our inferiors the benefit? Snobbery is surely a necessity only to those who are not sure of themselves. We who know we are the real thing—it is our *privilege* to be democratic.”

“Are these epigrams we are hearing?” Catherine smiled with a lift of her brows. “And is your brother serious, Cousin Sally, or is he poking fun at us?”

“I can’t tell you, Catherine. I never know when he means what he says.”

“Not to mention,” continued Randall imperturbably, “the benefit to ourselves of learning to value a fellow-being for his personal qualities purely, apart from any accidents of birth; and to choose our comrades on the only true basis of human fellowship—community of tem-

perament and interest—independently of any other consideration.”

Here Catherine, turning in her chair, directly and insistently addressed him. “There can’t be any community of temperament and interest except among those of the same social world. Exclusiveness is not vulgar snobbery. It is eminently reasonable.”

“Your smug little ‘social world’!” he smiled without so much as a glance at her.

“Your Utopian theory of leveling all classes, Arthur,” spoke up his portly brother-in-law, Hubert McCord, an able and prosperous corporation lawyer, “will never find any sympathizers in *this* house, you know—not while *Sally’s* at the head of it!”

“*God* seems always to have tolerated the subjection of the lower classes to the higher—of the weak to the strong—so why should *you* presume to think it intolerable, Arthur?” his sister reasoned with him.

“Lower classes?” broke in Catherine’s mother with characteristic vague irrelevance. “Oh, but, Judge, we must of course have lower classes! It’s so odd the way some otherwise quite nice people these days think we could get along without any lower classes!”

“And some dreadful people go so far these days, Madam Amy, as to think we could even get on without a hell!” he gravely lamented.

“Oh, but how could we? And as for the lower classes—why, my dear Judge, what selfish creatures we’d be if there were no poor for us to be charitable to!”

“You’d agree with the poet who wrote *The Hymn of the Elect*—wouldn’t you, Madam Amy?

“We thank Thee, Lord, for many poor,
If thus some rich may be;
For thus may we assist them with
Our blessed charity.

“We thank Thee, Lord, that sinners are
As sands upon the beach,
For thus may we, a chosen band,
Thy Gospel to them teach.” *

“How sweetly true!” exclaimed Madam Tyson.

Randall’s amused glance swept the table. But he met no answering smile. Even that silent, dull Joan, seated opposite him between Mr. McCord and Artie, and looking, in her simple but exquisitely fine white dimity frock, demurely girlish and irritatingly meek,—even she, no doubt, held—if she ever had an opinion about anything—as stubborn prejudices in favor of the rights of the class to which she so perilously clung, as did his sister herself.

“‘The poor we have always with us’ is likely to keep on being true,” said McCord, “so long as we refrain, with modern politeness, from killing off the undesirables, the left-overs, the supine and spineless creatures! It’s a heavy load for society to carry—the poor, the helpless, the incapable. But modern organized charity, with the nobly

* By Frederic Arnold Kummer.

generous support given it by our millionaires, does deal with the problem quite effectually,—the only way it *can* be dealt with while human nature is human nature,” he affirmed dogmatically.

“Then you really think, Hubert,” said Randall, a gleam in his eyes which belied the grave quiet of his tone and manner, for he was a statesman, not a politician; a social prophet rather than a social economist; “you really think that the only help for the horrors of abject poverty and unemployment as we all know that they exist is ‘charity’ as it is now practised? You think there is no better remedy than this merely temporary and most inadequate palliative of a deep-seated horror—a remedy that only hacks away at random at the jungle of evils that surround us! Poverty is a wide-spread disease. How do we deal with other epidemics of disease? We don’t merely nurse the patients while allowing the disease to go on spreading. We attack the cause of the disease. Is there no reconstruction of society in which unemployment and want *could* not be?”

“You are surely not so visionary as to think that such a state of society *is* a possibility?”

“My faith in God and man is even so high,” admitted Randall.

“How about the survival of the fit and the extinction of the unfit?” glibly demanded Hubert McCord with the air of cock-sureness by which he forged his pre-eminently successful way. “Isn’t that the law of nature, from beast to man? It seems to take all the weaklings the world can turn out to make blood for the few who are leaders and

strong—in the human as in the animal world. You may think it dreadful as applied to individuals. But after all, it reacts beneficially upon the individual.”

“If on that reasoning you justify abuses, then by the same process you would justify a Squeers running a Do-the-Boys-Hall. The strong exploiting the weak. He was even doing some good, you know—the boys were housed, fed and given a bit of schooling and were kept from being on the state for support. No, no, Hubert, we are on the verge of a social reconstruction in which the state shall not, as at present, merely foster the survival of the fit, but, as Huxley says, shall fit as many as possible to survive.”

“Well, isn’t that just what the charity of our millionaires is doing?” demanded Hubert.

“The charity of our millionaires?” Randall repeated dubiously. “Their activities seem to me to be directed more conspicuously to corrupting our legislatures, perverting our education through their endowment of universities, hindering the preaching of true Christianity through their support of churches; supplanting our democracy with a government by financiers for financiers. Oh, I grant you that they work very hard at thinking they are doing good—and it’s all perfectly futile as every one in his heart knows!”

“Well, Arthur, if you weren’t Sally’s brother you wouldn’t have *my* vote when you’re up for office! Men with your views are dangerous!”

“I hope we are—to the present state of things!”

“Sometimes, Arthur, I really suspect you are a

Socialist!" Sally dared this damning suspicion with a flush of shame at the insult she felt she was offering.

"Socialism," returned Arthur, unaware of being insulted, "merely aims to do for the benefit of the nation what our greatest business men have been engaged for some years in doing for the benefit of themselves. Bernard Shaw says," he added with what seemed to his sister utter irrelevance, "that all progress is a war on Society."

"As for Bernard Shaw, I don't like him!" she pronounced coldly as she rose to lead the way from the table.

Again Arthur was the only one to find in this characteristically feminine disposing of an argument anything amusing. As the ladies filed past him to the piazza not one of them but looked either serious or aggressive over his attack upon their deep-seated prejudices, from Sally's bristling pride, Catherine's indolent disdain and Madam Amy's bewildered astonishment at questioning things so fundamental and obvious, to Joan's passive sweetness.

"But, Uncle Arthur," inquired his namesake, heading him off as he was about to slip up-stairs to take a look at his sleeping boy and then settle down in his room with a book, "here's the question—*can* you dope out a scheme that's any improvement on the present bum arrangement?"—and Artie looked as though he were sure he had offered a clincher.

"Well, Artie," Randall patiently answered as they seated themselves about the moonlit piazza and sipped the black coffee which the butler was dispensing, "I couldn't 'dope out' a *worse* scheme than the present chaotic condition, that's sure."

"But, Uncle, the thing about the muck-rakers that makes me sick is that there's hardly one among them that wouldn't do just what a Rockefeller has done if he had the chance and the brains!"

"Exactly. That's just the point. *Therefore* we must inaugurate a new social order in which such perverted creatures are not, as now, inevitable. And, my boy, don't make the mistake of thinking that it takes a great intellect to be a great financier. Commercial acumen isn't intellect. It's a common order of mind that can be sufficiently interested in mere money-making to pile up a huge fortune. It takes, not brains, but cunning—and a willingness to sacrifice everything good in life, friends, relatives, honor, culture, for one thing—making money."

"Now do you know," softly Catherine's deep musical voice arrested the attention of all, "it seems to me so very much worse to rob a man of his good name than to take his goods and chattels from him. What right has any one to hold up to contumely a great public benefactor like Mr. Rockefeller or Mr. Carnegie? It is not only impertinent, it is malicious, the way the envy of the masses has maligned our great capitalists!"

"They have condemned, not 'maligned' them. You don't malign a man by telling the truth about him."

"What proof is there that the things they say *are* the truth?"

"The things they say' are not matters of opinion, but of recorded fact. However, it isn't the individual millionaire that should be condemned, but, as I said, a

social state that makes such perverted creatures inevitable. It is the root of the evil we want to get at."

"And that means a reconstruction of society?" asked Artie.

"I think so."

"How can you believe in a reform," broke in Sally, "that is based on the discontent of the weak with the success of the strong?"

"And that is ushered in," reiterated Catherine, "by the slandering of all our big men by their inferiors?"

"You may recall," said Randall coolly, "Jesus' scathing denunciations of the 'whited sepulchres' of his time, calling them 'a generation of vipers.' I confess his feeling towards the Pharisees is mine towards some modern philanthropists—I feel nothing but disgust for the hypocrisy (often unconscious hypocrisy, I admit) that poses as philanthropy, while the whole life of the 'philanthropist' is based, not on love, but on the exploiting of the masses whom he afterwards wants to patronize with gifts—with what he can't use—and call this patronage 'philanthropy'! I tell you," he concluded deliberately, as he rose to go away, "there's no use talking—there is no possibility of bolstering up any kind of an argument to prove that the present order is even *decent*, let alone just; an order of things that allows a few men to steal billions, then dole it out in barrels full to stay the evil they've been permitted to create!"

He thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled away, amid the silence of all, towards the door at the far end of the piazza.

But before he was out of ear-shot, the silence was broken by the voice of Bappis' nurse who had come out to the piazza to speak to Mrs. McCord ; and Randall, about to step into the house, paused an instant.

"Bappis is bawlin' for his Tante Joan," announced the girl.

Joan, instantly rising to obey the summons of her tyrannical nephew-by-adoption, was as instantly stopped by Mrs. McCord.

"Not to-night, Joan."

Joan obediently reseated herself.

"But," persisted the maid, "Bappis says he won't stop bawlin' till he *has* her, because she promised if he was good this afternoon she'd stay with him to-night until he was asleep."

"I did promise him, Cousin Sally," Joan acknowledged. "Would I better keep my promise?" she suggested hesitatingly.

"Go and tell Bappis," Mrs. McCord ordered the maid without replying to Joan, "that if he 'bawls' any more his Aunt Sally or his father will come to him!"

Joan, of course submitting, sank back again in her chair ; and the maid went away to deliver her message to a boy outraged with a sense of having been deceived and defrauded.

Randall, meditatively going into the house, made his way up-stairs to console his son.

IV

RANDALL was not a little astonished when, upon presenting himself at his boy's bedside, he was given to understand that even *his* society, heretofore so highly appreciated by his son, could not compensate the child for his bitter disappointment in being cheated of his promised nightly visit from "Tante Joan." He marvelled that so weak a character as Joan Laird appeared to be should have gained such hold upon the fancy of a child like Bappis who was wont to sense weakness as a cat senses a mouse and to play with it about as ruthlessly.

"But she's the only person *he'll* be good for," the nurse told him. "He knows he's got to be or she won't be his 'mother' any more."

"His 'mother'? Hm—m!"

Randall was half ashamed of himself for the suspicion the word roused in him of deep and dark designs on the part of that little cringing and most harmless looking young woman.

"Is she subtle enough to realize," he wondered, as he sat down in a big rocking-chair with Bappis in his arms, "that if there *is* any avenue of approach to me it is through—well, through the very route she is taking?"

With a quite impersonal, psychological interest, he fell to speculating about the girl. Wasn't it possible that one who could manage to keep herself installed as a visitor from year's end to year's end in a succession of most com-

fortable homes and to be tastefully gowned on no apparent income, would be acute in seeing her opportunity in other directions? But if her "motherliness" to Bappis was not disinterested, wasn't it odd that the child himself could be so taken in?—for Randall had a large faith in the unerring instinct of childhood to feel insincerity.

So little, however, did he regard himself as a matrimonial prize that it seemed to him she must surely have gumption enough to know that damaged matrimonial goods like himself were not worth such a waste of histrionic talent and that an equal amount of energy expended elsewhere—on Ned or Artie for instance—might bring more profitable returns. Judging, though, from her total lack of effort in their direction, she did not seem to think them within the range of her possibilities. In his modesty it did not occur to him that she might consider him a far higher stake for the exercise of her "histrionic talents."

Well, at all events, the calculations of the young lady (if, indeed, she *was* calculating on being Bappis' "mother"!) missed their mark by just one point—though that a rather essential one; namely, her assumption that he was a fish that *could* be baited. She might as well spare herself her pains. However, as Bappis profited by her misguided efforts to fix her own fortunes, far be it from him to go out of his way to undeceive her.

"Obber!" the now pacified boy in his arms suddenly broke in upon his thoughts, "I want to ask you something."

"Well, Bapp?"

"Obber, did my mother die?"

Randall did not answer at once. He could not. The

hour he had long dreaded—in which the inevitable questioning on the part of a wronged child must be met—had struck. It was the first time in three years and a half that Bappis had mentioned his mother.

“No, Bappis.”

“Then where is she?”

“She went away.”

“Where *to*?”

“She went home to her own mother and father.”

“But why doesn’t she live with us—like other boys’ mothers live with them, Obber?”

“She—prefers to live with her parents, Bappis.”

“Why doesn’t she come to see us?—or why don’t we go to see her?”

No answer.

“Is my mother a *bad* lady?”

“Your mother, Bappis, is good and lovely and beautiful, and she loves you.”

“Then why did she go away? And why doesn’t she come back?”

“Well, Bappis, she doesn’t like *me*!” Randall answered, reluctantly enough, though he had long ago decided that as Bappis must ultimately be told the truth, he should be gradually prepared for it from the moment that he began to ask questions.

“But *why*, Obber?” the boy asked wonderingly. “All the *other* ladies like you!”

“Bappis, would you like to leave me and go to your mother?”

"Couldn't we all live together, Obber?" asked Bappis wistfully.

"Your mother will not live with *me*, Bappis, though she very, very much wants her little boy. Would you leave me and go to her?"

"Could I come back to you?"

"If you went to her she would never, never let you come back to me."

"Then I won't ever go to her! I don't *like* her, Obber!"

"But she loves you, Bappis, and she is good. When you are older Obber will tell you all about it. You are too little to understand now. But always remember—your mother is good—and she loves you."

"If she doesn't love you, too, the way Aunt Sally likes Uncle Hubert, then I think she isn't *not* a good lady!"

"Believe Obber, Bappis. When you are older, you will understand."

"Well, anyway," the child turned his head sleepily upon his father's breast, "I've got Tante Joan now; wouldn't it be nice, Obber, if *she* was my mother?"

His eyes closed. And as Randall, his face white and strained from the sudden shock of this little catechism, gazed down upon the sleeping boy, the wild idea came to him that "Tante Joan," having hypnotized the child, spoke through him for the working out of her subtle schemes!—that by means of that strange occultism, the power of "suggestion," she was endeavoring to weave her web about both father and son!

"My nerves must be playing me tricks!" he scoffed

at his own sinister fancy, as, rising with the boy in his arms, he carried him back to his bed.

A few moments later, he went down stairs and strolled out again to the piazza; not, however, joining the company he had abandoned just after dinner, for it had since been formidably augmented by two motor-loads of visitors from neighboring suburban homes. Seated alone in the shadow of a dark end of the piazza, he lit his pipe and smoked, unobserved, as he thought with mingled bitterness and stoicism of the subject of his little talk with Bappis—though occasionally his weary mind wandered from this haunting theme to a contemplation of the gaily chattering party at the moonlit end of the long rambling house.

He had not been there long when he saw Catherine Tyson extricate herself, in a cool and leisurely manner, from the group of admiring males, who surrounded her as flies about sugar, and stroll away from them into the house, her long green skirts trailing gracefully after her. Randall's eyes followed appreciatively her beautiful lines as she moved, her splendid shoulders, slim waist and long sweep of limb.

"Gods! She's a handsome woman! No wonder Sally thinks she only has to exhibit her to have me fall right in with her idea!"

He rose to knock the ashes from his pipe over the piazza railing, and, as he turned to sit down again, there at his elbow stood the beautiful object of his mental comment. She had gone in one door and come out by another at his end of the house, ostensibly to join him.

Had she, then, seen him sitting in the shadow and deliberately detached herself from the rest to come to him? He had supposed himself invisible here or he would have chosen another place.

"So your *rôle* now is to be a reformer, is it?" she pleasantly inquired, as though taking up the talk where it had been dropped just after dinner. Her air of confidence as she settled herself comfortably against the railing of the piazza, suggested that no doubt he fully appreciated the rare honor she conferred. There she missed it, to be sure; but if he was too indifferent to feel flattered, he did feel both curious and interested. No one could help finding a woman interesting who was so free from self-consciousness and affectation as Catherine Tyson was; with a manner almost dogged in its absolute naturalness. Her honesty was, indeed, two-thirds of her charm. She might be capable of villainy and possibly of cruelty—but she would perform it daringly, openly. No coward, she! Yet, withal, one felt she was not without subtlety. A curiously arresting personality!

"A reformer? I am hardly so ambitious," he replied, "or so self-righteous. You don't mind my smoking?"

"No, *I'm* not a reformer."

He drew on his pipe without replying.

"I do not believe, you know," she went on, "that the 'idle rich' you so enjoy raking, who contribute the funds by which philanthropy can give a grip to the helpless, do it from any but the purest motives."

"Yes?" he said politely.

"I see that you are one of those perfectly maddening

men who will not take a woman seriously—as a creature who thinks!”

“Women don’t think. They dress.”

“You have been unfortunate in the women you have known.”

“I beg you won’t let it distress you, my dear young lady!”

Looking rather baffled at the unaccustomed experience of having the favor of her society treated nonchalantly, she nevertheless, after an instant, persisted.

“You really think we’d be happy in a social state where every one was on a level?”

“‘Happy’? Pardon me, but I suspect you don’t begin to know the real meaning of the word.”

“I’m having a pretty good time in my ignorance.”

“I am sure you are.”

“Well? Where ignorance is bliss!”

“Life would seem to hold something more important for us than just having a good time,” he said musingly.

“Well, then, what *does* life mean to you?” she humored him.

“To me? I don’t count, you know—having made pretty much of a mess of it.”

“Most people make a mess of it for that matter. *Are* there any all-round successful lives?”

“To most of us,” he slowly answered, betrayed at last into serious discussion with her, “life is, I suppose, just a compromise with one’s ideals; a putting up with second best. Yet there are a few rare men who do hold

on to their youthful ideals to the very end. And what gods they seem to the rest of us!"

"What bores, rather. Reformers, who disapprove of everything that's comfortable! *You* have not compromised with your ideals or you wouldn't be such a—what Artie calls a 'knocker'! Do you know I do hate a knocker!"

"I shall try to bear up under it."

She looked up at him derisively. "Anything more conscious of its dignity and its superiority!"

"Meaning me? I don't seem to see myself so, really!"

"A 'knocker' must feel that he knows so much more than the rest of established society, Judge Randall."

"What is a knocker, Miss Tyson? A man who has the insight to realize the evils of his day and the courage to rise up and denounce them. Yes, the world has always hated the knocker. So much so that it crucifies him. Did you ever chance to read the dedication of George Cabot Lodge's drama, 'Cain'? *To the Deathless Memory of Jesus of Nazareth, Seer and Sayer of Truth, Who Was Believed Only By the Poor and Outcast, Who was Recognized By All Reputable and Respectable People as the Avowed Enemy of Law, Order and Religion, and Who Was At Last Brought to His Death by the Priesthood of the Orthodox Church, Through the Operation of the Established Courts of Social Justice, This Poem is Inscribed with Measureless Love.*"

Before Catherine could answer, their attention was arrested by the approach of her mother strolling down the long piazza on the arm of Joan Laird; Catherine and Randall, standing in shadow, were not visible at their

end of the porch until the other two were close upon them.

Randall noticed that Catherine looked annoyed and bored at the impending interruption, and as he never for a moment gave her credit for sharing Sally's ambition to make her Bappis' step-mother, he wondered why she should wish to prolong a talk which only revealed how hopelessly they differed about everything under the sun.

He was also not oblivious (keenly observant as he was) to the sudden gleam of satisfaction in Mrs. Tyson's shallow eyes as she caught sight of them together, and her instant motion to draw Joan away with her. But he went forward immediately to offer the matron a chair, and, not waiting for her to decline, placed the only other available chair at the service of Joan. Stepping back to his place by the porch railing, he reached Catherine's side just as she, slightly raising herself to sit on the railing, deliberately rested her two daintily slipped feet on the chair placed for Joan as though quite unconscious of the girl's insignificant presence.

"One moment!" Randall, addressing Joan, instantly stepped forward again; "I'll bring a chair from the house."

"No, thank you," Joan's mild voice stopped him. "I am going up-stairs—to get Mrs. Tyson a wrap."

"If you will be *so* sweet and dear!" Mrs. Tyson called after her retreating figure as it passed through the door close by; while Randall found and brought forward another chair against her return.

"Mama!" Catherine spoke to her mother in a tone of annoyance, "why did you bring *her* here?" She

turned in sudden appeal to Randall. "Do take me away before she comes back! I can't abide her!"

"Oh, come!" he demurred good-naturedly. "She's just saved you a trip up-stairs for your mother's wrap."

"Yes, she acts like a lady's maid and expects to be treated as one of us. I simply cut her!"

"So I observe."

"But, dear love," protested Mrs. Tyson, quick to scent Randall's distaste for such ruthless slighting of the girl and eager to counteract the unfortunate impression she feared her daughter was making, "of course Joan expects to be treated as an equal—a Laird, you know, and her mother a Lee!"

"And Sally's guest," Randall gravely added.

"A self-invited one, Judge Randall," Catherine returned, coloring under his covert criticism, though quite ignoring her mother's protest. "It isn't as though Cousin Sally asked her here."

"My *dear!*" Mrs. Tyson feebly tried to check her, though very obviously afraid of her.

"But," Randall answered, "if Sally didn't want her, her inviting herself would not *bring* her here. Sally isn't that sort, you know—to have people about her that she doesn't want."

Except that he always did incline to befriend the underdog, he rather wondered at his instinct to defend Joan, of whom he was himself thinking that it was her overworked, neglected mother to whom she should be giving these services she so abjectly offered to those who scorned her for them. Mrs. Tyson, for instance, was neither old

nor weak, but as well able as Joan herself to go up-stairs for her wrap. Was it likely that the girl fetched and carried like that for her own mother the little time she spent with her?

"Mother!" cried Catherine, "I really came down here to Judge Randall to get away from Joan Laird's toadying. When she comes back with your wrap, please take her away!"

"Certainly, my love," Mrs. Tyson acquiesced nervously, "though I am sure, dearest, she is quite harmless and wouldn't annoy you for the world if she realized how sensitive you are!"

"Oh, don't be so ridiculous, Mama, dear!"

"But the child really means to be kind, I think, and attentive to every one, my dear, and—ah!" she lowered her voice, "here she comes!"

She rose at once to carry out her daughter's injunctions. "Thank you, dear child," she said as Joan laid the wrap about her shoulders. "So kind of you, I'm sure, though of course I could have rung for a maid, but most of them have gone to bed, I suppose, by this time and it's so comfy to have some one by like you," she rattled on, "to anticipate one's needs and save lazy people like me from the least exertion of any kind whatever! I should be so perfectly charmed to have you visit *me* now and then, my dear, when my daughter is away from home—just to have you 'round, you know, the way you are here."

"Thank you," replied Joan tentatively, almost expectantly, a deep color dyeing her sensitive face. Why should a girl of such tough nerve have a sensitive face,

Randall wondered, observing at the same time what an excellent foil she was, in the extreme simplicity she always affected in dress, to the elaborate elegance of Catherine's costumes. The two maidens did certainly set each other off. Joan, it seemed to him, was extraordinarily clever in her way of dressing, this conspicuous simplicity being not only less expensive, but exactly suited to her child-like slimness and delicacy.

"Now, Mama, don't *drop* that wrap!" Catherine admonished, apropos of her parent's unconquerable tendency to shed her belongings like a moulting fowl. "It's the best one you have and it's awfully becoming to me."

"I'll be careful, dearest—oh!" she suddenly exclaimed with a quite infantile glee, "I've an idea! It would be a comfort to you, Catherine dear, I'm sure, while you are at Bar Harbor next month, to know that I had Miss Laird with me, *wouldn't* it, darling? Some one to see that I don't drop things about and to remind me of things I'm so apt to forget! You could feel, dear, that I was being daughtered almost as sweetly as my own big girl——"

"Oh, *Mama!*" Catherine cut it short in frank disgust. "I would suggest," she added mildly, "that you ask Miss Laird her terms for her services as companion."

"I shall be pleased to come to you as your *guest*, Mrs. Tyson," Joan hastily answered as though eager to clinch the thing, her face now very pale in the moonlight. "In Miss Tyson's absence," she added.

"How lovely of you, dear! Shall we walk about again?" Mrs. Tyson hastily added, slipping her arm

through Joan's, evidently afraid to risk Catherine's further involving herself. How blind her high-spirited daughter was, to be sure, to her own best interests! Why couldn't she be more tactful?

Joan acquiesced and they strolled away.

"There now!" Catherine looked up at Randall with a smile that showed the beautiful white evenness of her teeth, "am I right about her?—accepting an invitation like that almost before it is quite offered! I actually believe she'd consent to visit us when *I'm* home!"

"That *would* take 'nerve,'" Randall significantly admitted, though in his heart he was disagreeably shocked that even Joan Laird could go to such lengths in self-humiliation. Surely the tone and atmosphere of such a creature couldn't be the best association in the world for Bappis!

Catherine's musical laugh rippled from between her red lips. "You are delightful!" she said. "You know I'm not used to being taken as you take me. I suppose I *have* been awfully spoiled. It's rather a refreshing novelty to find myself 'sat on.' I suppose you get so used to bullying criminals that, Southerner though you are, you forget how to be suave to ladies."

"Sentiment, I admit, has long since taken a permanent back seat in my life."

"Permanent?"

"You might as well try to revive a dead cat. It took a lot of shots to kill it, but it's dead to stay."

"You can't be sure."

"Where there's no life there's no hope."

"You can't convince me that there's no life. You're too young, too successful."

He smoked without replying.

"Let the right person take you in hand and you will find yourself as much alive as ever you were."

"Far be it from me to discourage you!"

"'Discourage' me?"

"From taking me in hand."

"Thank you, I'm not applying for the job. You'd like to be taken in hand, would you?"

"If it would amuse you, I shouldn't dream of objecting. It's only fair to warn you, however, that you'd be sadly wasting your time."

"I wonder whether you and I know what we are trying to talk about!" she exclaimed.

"I suppose *you* do. I'm not sure I do."

"Well," she conceded, "I do like your sincerity! I am (perhaps unfortunately) incapable of pretence myself."

"Your worst enemy couldn't accuse you of pretending, Miss Tyson."

"You don't like me," she cheerfully pronounced. "I ought to be complimented that you'd take the trouble!—so great a man!" she laughed, "and so indifferent to most of our feeble sex!"

"Ah!" he suddenly bent his head to listen as a child's cry came from a window above. "That's Bappis, isn't it? He can't be well to be waking so often!" he exclaimed in quick anxiety. "He's fretted himself into a fever because Sally wouldn't let that girl go to him! Excuse me, please? Good-night!"—and before she could answer he

had hurried indoors and was bounding up-stairs three steps at a time to his boy.

Catherine, sitting very still where he had left her, gazed thoughtfully out over the motionless, spectral tree-tops of the grounds. She admitted to herself that never in her life had she felt so on her mettle to win a man's notice and regard. Though she did not share Sally's matrimonial ambitions, she was too keen not to be aware of them. It was the sportsman's instinct for the hunt, the gambler's love of the game, that stirred her as she had never been stirred by easy prey and that made her, if Randall had only known it, a protagonist he would better avoid than brave—a fact that he was to learn very soon, to his chagrin and self-disgust.

V

It was a distinct blow to Judge Randall to be plaintively asked by his son the next day, *when* he intended to go back to the city. "Because you know, Obber, as long as you're here, Aunt Sally won't let Tante Joan be my chum."

"And you want Obber to go? You like Tante Joan better?"

Bappis buried his face against his father's breast and hugged him tight, but he made no denial. Randall wondered whether this were not worse than his usually painful partings from the boy.

"You see," Bappis murmured, ashamed of his apostasy, "when you go, Aunt Sally will let Tante Joan play with me again and put me to bed and tell me stories and be my squaw!"

Randall put it to his sister when he found an opportunity to talk with her alone that Sunday morning.

"What's your idea, Sally?"

"I thought you wouldn't want Joan to monopolize him while you were here," she answered, coloring, for evasion or subterfuge were not natural to her. "And I do think she spoils him beyond everything. She certainly doesn't do him any good."

"She seems to make him happier."

To insure their privacy—a thing not easily found in this houseful of guests and servants—he had invited her

to come to his bed-chamber. It was a large room, furnished in beautiful old carved and inlaid mahogany. Several generations of Randalls had been born on the huge four-posted bed which filled one-third of the room and which was known in the family as "the ten-acre lot."

Sitting in easy chairs before one of the two French windows that opened on a piazza, the brother and sister, as they talked, gazed out upon the dancing waters of the beautiful Chesapeake.

"But, Arthur," Mrs. McCord argued, "Joan indulges Bappis in everything that ought to be curbed in a child! She even encourages him in his really demoralized taste for playing at being a highwayman, a bloody Indian chief, any and everything in the whole category of crime and depravity! He never wants to play being anything good and decent."

"And she encourages this—depraved taste?"

"She says it's 'not depraved, only masculine'—at which, of course, Hubert and the boys chaff her unmercifully. The only attention the men ever pay her is to poke fun at her."

"Yet she's not bad looking, is she?"

"She's too shy and retiring—she bores them. Except when occasionally she unwittingly makes them laugh."

"You are sure she's quite unconscious of it when she drives such a sly knife as that—'not depraved, only masculine'?"

"It's her unconsciousness that makes her amusing."

"You were ever a trusting, unsuspecting soul, Sally!"

"But seriously, I do think she doesn't do Bappis any good. She makes him so much more selfish, Arthur. One weakly unselfish person always makes a dozen selfish ones. She has us all imposing on her."

"'Unselfish'? You don't really think all this apparent unselfishness in the way she waits on you all, is purely disinterested kindness of heart? I confess I don't believe she's as stupid as that. She doesn't *look* that stupid! And you yourself admitted yesterday that she made herself useful to feather her nest."

"But since when have unselfishness and kindness of heart been synonymous with stupidity?" Sally inquired smiling, relieved to find him taking this view of the girl's attentions to his son, though she was not sure just what he meant to imply.

"It was you," he answered, "who spoke of 'weakly unselfish people.' Her performances would seem to me idiotic if I didn't think them self-interested! And indeed I prefer a villain to a fool any day."

"And her running after and waiting on your boy—that too seems to you—'self-interested'?" she laughed, giving him a quick, keen glance. "I myself have never given her credit, I confess, for such guile!"

"I was not thinking so much of what she does for Bappis, as of the way she fetches and carries for all you able-bodied grown-ups."

"But wouldn't her giving herself so to Bappis come under the same head?" She was determined to understand how he stood on that point.

"Well, you know, dear, *I* think Bappis a very lovable and interesting child when he's taken in the right way. It doesn't seem to me altogether impossible that the girl might get as much as she gives out of their 'intimacy,' as Bappis calls it. I wouldn't interfere with it," he quietly added, "if I were you—even when I am here. It makes my visits unwelcome to Bappis—at which I am foolish enough to feel a bit hurt."

She concealed the start this change of front gave her.

"He calls her self-interested and a villain, but 'prefers a villain to a fool' and he believes (or says he does) in the sincerity of her goodness to Bappis and doesn't want it interfered with! I'm afraid of all this!"

She made no verbal reply to him, but her swift mental comment was a determination to straightway present Joan with a mileage book together with a suggestion that she "move on"—though at the same time her heart misgave her at the thought of Bappis' grief, rage and unmanageableness in the event of the abrupt departure of his chum.

Mrs. McCord was herself too truly a mother not to understand, with a passing regret at her own inability to love the child, why he should be so crazy about Joan; for the girl seemed to her really to mother him in a way he had not known since the catastrophe four years ago which had so ruthlessly torn him from his own mother's arms. Sally was too sincere to be readily suspicious of duplicity in others, and she did not believe in her heart that Joan was either subtle or daring enough to be cherishing any ulterior matrimonial ambition in her devotion to Bappis. Otherwise she would long since have sent her

about her business, as indeed she had been tempted to do at any rate, for fear of the possible effect upon Arthur of her mothering of his boy. And now it looked as though her fear had been justifiable.

But the imperative necessity of separating Bappis from his friend was not a pleasant thing to face.

As she did not reply to his last remark, Randall, after a silence, introduced with evident reluctance another matter about which he felt obliged to speak with her and for which, indeed, he had invited her to this strict privacy.

She knew from sad experience the only theme he ever discussed with her behind a locked door, and now, as he broached it, the slim white hands folded loosely in her lap, were involuntarily clasped firmly to stay the nervous tremor that shook her whenever this intimate and harassing subject was haled forth.

"I had a letter in this morning's mail," he began, and she did not have to look at him to know that the color had left his face.

"From Laura?"

He nodded.

"The same old story, I suppose?"

"A reply to mine in which I made a condition—you will think I was mad!"

"You didn't again ask her to come back to you?"

"I told her that as I would not part with Bappis, the question for her to decide was whether her aversion to me was stronger than her love for her son who sorely needed her; whether, for the boy's sake, she would consent, now, after four years' separation, to re-marriage."

"Oh! But don't you *hear* the wild gossip that such a step would rouse, Arthur dear! And you are only just beginning to live down the speculations of all the scandal-mongers of Maryland as to the cause of your mysterious divorce!"

"I have that at least to be grateful to Laura for—that her native dignity, her perfect breeding, saved us both from scandal-mongers!"

"Yes," Sally reluctantly conceded, "if she had not kept so perfectly quiet about it all, I suppose there'd have been no political career for you, dear, would there?"

"It was not, however," he shrugged, a faint bitterness in his tone, "for my sake, you know, that she kept quiet. It was her pride—and for Bappis' sake. And," he said abruptly, "it is of Bappis I am thinking now—certainly not of myself—when I ask her to return to me. And I can't help believing," he added, his tone deepening, "that much as she thinks she would compromise and humiliate herself by returning to me, she'd really be far less unhappy, poor thing, if she came back. I wrote her that if her self-love—her self-respect and her dignity that she thinks have been so outraged—are greater than her love for our child, then I feel that my larger love which is ready to sacrifice anything for him, ready to humble myself before her after—after all that has occurred; ready to resume a union which gave me so little—if I am ready to do this and she is not—then I am justified in keeping him. For, by heaven, Sally, think how much greater would be my sacrifice than hers in such a reunion!—what a perdition to live daily in the presence of her undying sense of in-

jury!—to be tolerated as a necessary evil by one's wife! Yet—to make up to Bappis—I'd bear it. If she can't make an equal sacrifice——” He waved his hand in conclusive dismissal of the matter.

“And her answer, Arthur?”

“She will not come back to me.”

“You might know, dear,” Sally sighed, “that nothing *could* move her obstinacy!”

“But she bends her pride to actually plead—can you hear Laura pleading?—that I give her Bappis,” he said sadly. “How she has suffered, Sally!”

“You sympathize with her too much. Think how devoid of sympathy with you she always was!”

“But Bappis was and is her heart's blood! You know that. And you know how he loved her—and now he is forgetting her! I would do anything in the world to make up to her for the unhappiness I've caused her!—except the one thing she asks of me—give up Bappis.”

“If it is a question of the boy's own good?” Sally suggested hesitatingly.

“In the long run I am convinced that Bappis needs me more. In the long run, you understand—as he grows up.”

“Then you will refuse even her—‘pleading,’ of course?”

“It is hard to!”

“But you will, I know.”

He rose abruptly and paced the floor. “She cannot care for him as I do,” he said with repressed passion, “or she would stop at nothing to get him! If our posi-

tions were reversed—if she kept him from me—I'd get him, by God, if I had to kill her! But she—poor little narrow soul!—she won't even tell a lie to get him! I offer to send him to her for a visit if she will promise to return him; or to let her have him for six months of the year, if at the end of the six months she'll send him back—I know how absolutely I could trust her promise. Well, she won't promise. Why, in her place I'd promise anything! I'd respect her if she'd lie to me and deceive me to get him! But I tell you she cares more for her pride and her dignity and her petty puritan ideas of right than for the child of her womb! She insists she must have him absolutely; to take him out of my life; away from my influence. Which means that he would grow up with the teaching that his father was a low-down voluptuary!—forgive me, Sally!” he impatiently interpolated, “but the thing maddens me! I tell you this matter of divorce is no simple thing when there is a child in the case!”

“Brother!—Dear!” came from the depths of Sally's heart in tenderest sympathy as she looked up into his white, drawn face, her own full of distress. He paused at her side and passively held the hand she slipped into his.

“What am I to do?” he dully asked. “It is hideous to deny her! But what else can I do? There's no least hope of her ever changing. You know her—when once she takes a stand!”

“Then let her suffer the penalty of her stubbornness.”

He did not answer at once, as again he paced the length of his room, his hands clasped behind him.

At last once more he stopped beside her. “Sally,

there's just one thing—Bappis must be guarded, you know. Though Laura won't lie to me, she'll steal him if she can. She has admitted she will. If she once did get him, I'd never get him back—unless,—well, it would make me murderous, Sally, to lose him!" he said, with a gleam in his eye that made her heart turn cold. "So, if you don't want our name disgraced by a crime, keep a close watch!"

"You know that I will, dear!"

"Thank you. You will think me mad when I tell you it has crossed my mind that this Joan, devoting herself so extraordinarily to Bappis, may be an agent of Laura's!"

"Arthur!" she exclaimed in genuine alarm, "you *will* become nervously upset if you let yourself go like this! Joan never saw Laura in her life!"

"My fear night and day is that his mother may steal him. God knows I wouldn't blame her. But it must not happen, Sally!"

"It won't happen through *my* neglect, Arthur!"

"You will be very watchful?"

"You may trust me."

"I know that I may, dear, bless you!" he said gratefully, then with strange abruptness he turned away from her, suddenly looking very tired. "That is all then, Sally—I won't detain you any longer."

She rose to go. "Must I tell the chauffeur that you go into town to-night, dear, or to-morrow morning?"

"With Hubert and Ned in the morning."

"And you will be out again next Saturday?"

"Not until the week after. I shall be kept busy in Annapolis."

"Very well," she answered, feeling a quick relief in knowing that the ordeal of sending Joan away could be postponed for nearly two weeks. On no account must the girl be here when her brother came again. Her relations with Bappis impressed Arthur quite too seriously.

VI

“ ‘THE weaker sex’ and the ‘lords of creation’!—who ever invented such misleading phrases?” Judge Randall inquired derisively, when on that Sunday afternoon, through no fault of his own, as he assured himself, he found himself alone with Catherine Tyson on the shore of the bay in front of the terraced lawn at Beechlands. “The weaker sex indeed! We are puppets and pawns in the hands of you women!”

“You *are*, for the most part,” agreed Catherine. “If ever I have the fortune to meet a man whom I *can’t* lead by the nose—well, he may have *me*!”

“Then I’ve lost my chance, haven’t I?”

“I’ve not been aware of pulling *you* about by a chain! What, by the way, if I may inquire, calls forth your derision as to ‘the weaker sex’?”

They were both in riding habit, having just returned from a long canter up the beach. One of the stable men had taken away their horses and they had, by common consent, strolled down to the shore instead of going at once into the house.

It had been at Sally’s instigation that they had gone out together this afternoon, Randall having welcomed her proposal as a way of escape from the misery of his broodings; and it was not until now, as he felt a sense of pleasure steal over him in the lovely day, the soft air, the beauty of Catherine’s fine face under her jaunty cap, and

the alluring charm of her "stunning figure," as he mentally pronounced it, in her close-fitting dark blue habit, that he began to realize, with some amusement, how he was being worked into Sally's scheme.

Naturally, then, he could not reply with candor to Miss Tyson's question.

"I'm afraid if you wait to find a man whom *you* can't lead by the nose,' you'll die 'an appropriated blessing,'" he evaded.

"You making gallant speeches!—and to me!"

"A European looking on at our American life usually decides that the sole purpose of an American man's existence is to make things easy and comfortable for women."

"A worthy purpose, I'm sure. In Europe its usually the other way about, don't you think so?"

"It may be in some countries. But here in the United States—tell me!—what does the woman of our class, the leisure class of women, contribute to the *summum bonum*, since it has gone out of fashion for her to be the mother of a family?"

"She contributes all that is comfortable and lovely in domestic life."

"Yes?" he mused. "Well!" he dropped the subject and suddenly brought from his pocket a handful of yellow tickets. "By the way, will you be so good as to dispose of these?—you and Sally. A vaudeville entertainment at her church in town. My laundress, who is a member of the church, bullied me into buying a fistful of them."

"Your washwoman a member of St. John's? She misled you. She may belong to the Mission."

"You don't have that kind of people at St. John's? How do you keep them out? Such people, to be sure, have no business with religion anyway, have they?"

"I see no necessity for their having their religion, any more than their meals, in close proximity to us. Why shouldn't they have their own churches?"

"Why, indeed? The ethics Jesus taught would certainly not warrant the same church, let alone the same pew, for the lowly and the proud. Now, would they?"

"If it pleases you to be sarcastic!" she smiled with a lift of her eye-brows. "I don't see how a man of your brains can be a Socialist—if you really are one! You seem to me to overlook so many unanswerable objections."

"For instance?"

"More government ownership would simply mean more opportunities for grafting."

"Under our present system, undoubtedly. Those in power have such big stakes in bad government that, you'll observe, it is impossible for any 'reform' administration to outlast one term. Let us have a system in which there would *be* no big stakes in bad government."

"It wouldn't be possible. Another thing—Socialism would foster laziness, thriftlessness."

"Our present system fosters idleness and waste only in the rich. Under Socialism only the industrious would be cared for, of whatever class. The man who wouldn't work (and the woman too) would have to starve."

"But," she objected, "Socialism so serenely ignores

the fact that there are many men of many minds. Even in the same family. Look at the difference, for instance, between your own nephews, Artie and Ned. Artie with his slang, his brusqueness, his manliness; and Ned with his elegant fastidiousness, his—well!” she lifted her hands as though to ward off a shock at the inexpressibleness of Ned. “Why, you know,” she laughed, “Cousin Sally admitted to me to-day that Ned puts the ribbons in her underclothing for her!”

“Putting in ribbons is good enough for Ned.”

“And writes poetry. Do you ever read Ned’s poetry? And goes around telling people, ‘I’m a poet,’ and offers them his verses to read. He writes poems to *me*. Want to hear one?”

She drew from her blouse pocket a fancifully lettered card and read impressively:

“‘To A Snow-Drop.

“‘The snow-drops have come out to-day
 Regardless of the weather;
They nod in pantomimic play—
The snow-drops have come out to-day,
They bend beneath the north wind’s sway
 And softly sing together—
The snow-drops have come out to-day
 Regardless of the weather.’

“He ought to be stopped, Judge!”

“Under Socialism Ned would be a lady’s maid or a man-milliner instead of a lawyer and a poet—since every one would find his proper level. Oho!” he suddenly

uttered a low exclamation as at this instant, far up on the beach, appeared Joan and Bappis in their bathing-suits, stepping out into the water. "She's taking him out wading. Odd, isn't it, that she's not bored by so much of the little man's society?"

"Oh, I don't know—inasmuch as it's always in the public eye that she cultivates Bappis' society. You haven't observed that fact? It's been particularly patent since *you* came!" she looked up at him with amusement. "And then, too, Bappis is the only male creature who seems to care for *her* society!"

Randall, not replying, thoughtfully poked the sand with his riding-crop.

"I notice," he presently remarked speculatively, "that the men who come here, all seem to want to meet her and then—when they've tried her out—drop her. Odd!"

"I haven't seen you 'trying her out'?"

"You keep me under your eye, do you?"

"Unless you've been doing it on the sly!—and then, like the others, 'dropped her.'"

The tone of this remark was an inquiry. But he did not reply to it.

"You need to be under some one's eye," she added, "exposed as you are, poor 'pawn and puppet' (didn't you call yourself?) to the wiles of so many subtle Delilahs!" she lazily laughed. "By the way," she changed the subject, "I spent the morning in my room wrestling with the book I heard you telling Cousin Sally you admired so hugely—I was curious, you see, to learn what your taste was in the way of novels."

"You mean Henry James' 'The Wings of a Dove'?"

"If that's the kind of a novel you like!" she rolled up her eyes in despair. "Why, I've been through at least eight chapters to find out the result of an interview the heroine had with her physician and I don't know *yet* whether he decided anything was the matter with her!—though the eight chapters talk of nothing else! The way your favorite author can cover reams of paper without coming to a point and *saying* anything! And I'm really very anxious about this poor girl's health!"

"But, my dear young lady, you surely don't read Henry James to find out what's going *on*, I hope! Because never in the course of a two-volume novel does he, by any chance, let you know."

"What *does* he do, then, with his two volumes full of words?"

"What does he do? With a subtlety that's uncanny he makes living personalities move so vividly and vitally across his pages that you see the very whites of their eyes—you see them as in life, yet know just as much about them, no more, no less—though you are avid to know more—to know all!"

"You get all that out of him? I'll stick it out, then, to the bitter end of the two volumes, if my feeble intellect will bear the strain of his awful subtlety!"

"It's an acquired taste to like 'his awful subtlety.'"

"I shall never hope to get so far as to *like* it!"

"I think myself he overdoes it," Randall conceded, "to the point of making it lose its artistic quality. Of course his fine shades of meaning could only be expressed by a

complex style—but it does seem to me at times that he could accomplish it without *quite* so much cumbersome machinery.”

“It is surely an extremely silly style that makes one grope so hard for the meaning,” insisted Catherine.

“I grant you his style does sometimes get in the way of one’s catching any thought at all. And of course to that extent is inartistic. We must talk it over when you’ve finished ‘The Wings of a Dove.’”

“But I leave in ten days and you are not coming out again, are you, inside of two weeks?”

“I had not meant to. You’ll be here next Saturday and Sunday?”

“Yes; until the fifteenth.”

He gazed thoughtfully out across the shining waters of the Bay under the late afternoon sun. But he did not say whether he would come.

“It is time for tea;” Catherine made a movement to rise and he sprang up to give her his hand. Their eyes met as their fingers touched and for an instant fire answered fire. Then side by side they strolled up the path to the house.

“You think you’ll come again next week-end?” she asked.

“I don’t know—though I *am* curious to hear what you’ll have to say when you get to the end of volume two.”

“Oh, what I’ll have to say won’t be worth your coming all the way from Annapolis to hear it! Well,” she smiled as they were parting in the hall, “we’ve had what Bappis calls ‘a great time’ this afternoon, haven’t we?”

“Fine!” his smile met hers. And then they went their separate ways to dress for the Sunday evening tea which was one of the notably charming features of the summers at Beechlands and at which every family of the countryside was invariably represented by one or two of its members.

VII

RANDALL was too busy at the Capitol, during the week that followed, to give any definite thought to the rather interesting life at Beechlands just now, though he was dimly aware of it, from time to time, as a luminous background in his sombre consciousness.

But when on the next Saturday afternoon, contrary to previous plans, he boarded the train at Annapolis for the little station from which he would walk to Beechlands, he had leisure, on the way, to speculate about a number of things that had been buzzing about in his brain demanding attention.

His decision to go to Beechlands to-day had been sudden, unpremeditated. At least not consciously premeditated. He seldom got down there more than once in two weeks and he had told Sally definitely, when bidding her good-by last Monday, that he would not come to-day. Why was he, then, going?

“Am I playing with fire?”

The McCords would not of course be expecting him. At least Sally would not. And Catherine Tyson would be the last one to suggest to his sister what he was sure that astute young woman did not doubt—the large improbability of a man’s foregoing, voluntarily, his last chance of the season to enjoy her society—and her beauty and her charm.

He hoped Sally, unaided by outside suggestion, would

not be equally perspicacious. Bappis would be the sufferer if she were, for Randall was sure that Joan Laird would be sent away before he was again expected. That was one reason why he had not let them know he was coming. It would give Bappis a few days more of this extraordinarily valued new acquaintance.

He had reflected in the past week, off and on, upon Catherine's assertion that Joan's friendliness to Bappis was always "in the public eye." That Catherine herself believed her own statement he did not doubt. And Catherine was nothing if not observant. Yet he could not quite reconcile such a supposition with the boy's utter faith in Joan.

It was not until he was nearing his destination that he demanded of himself very definitely what it was, really, that was bringing him back a week before he ought to come? Was it for a fact, in addition to his ever-present longing for Bappis, the rather persistent picture his mind had carried all the week of a gloriously beautiful woman on a horse; and her later transformation in a white evening gown, which had fairly carried him off his feet? Was it, in part, his rather keen interest in the prospective discussion with Miss Tyson of "The Wings of a Dove"? He *was* amusedly curious to hear how that piece of psychical analysis had affected her very matter-of-fact mentality. He carried with him in his suit-case another two-volume novel, the one he considered the finest in James' "later style"—"The Golden Bowl"—which he would present to her if she had acquired the taste.

Was he indeed, then, after four years of torpor, thaw-

ing out and becoming susceptible again to a woman's charm? God forbid!

Upon his arrival at the small station near Beechlands, he was relieved to find no motor awaiting him, for this was sufficient evidence that Sally did not look for him.

The day was clear and not hot and he decided to take the circuitous path through the stretch of woodland, known as "Randall's Woods," that lay between the station and the outskirts of his sister's home.

He had reached the thickest part of the miniature forest and was about a half mile from the end of his walk, when a turn in the path over the side of a hill brought suddenly into view, far below at the foot of the slope, a sight which stopped him short. There, under the ample shade of a huge old tree, sat Joan Laird, her back against the tree, and Bappis, fast asleep, lying beside her, his head in her lap.

The suddenness of his thus coming upon these two, himself unheard and unseen, gave him a start that was like a sharp shock. He stood motionless as he looked down upon them, afraid to breathe lest he disturb the picture.

Joan, in a pink chambre frock trimmed with white, her arm laid along the length of Bappis' short body, while with the other hand she mechanically smoothed his cheek, looked such a picture of girlish innocence and sweetness that the hard lines of Randall's face softened as his eyes rested upon her. Catherine's aspersion, "Always in the public eye," recurred to him. Joan could hardly have managed it so well as this—to intercept his unexpected

return by a tableau in a secluded and unfrequented spot in the forest. The cleverest schemer in the world couldn't make Bappis go to sleep "on tap," as it were, without drugging him!

Deliberately choosing a point from which he could watch the unconscious pair below, without himself being seen, he cautiously seated himself.

Joan's countenance, her eyes downcast upon the boy's face, was sad and serious; yet her solitude here, with the sleeping child in her arms, seemed to release from her usually constrained exterior, a soft, warm glow of utter womanliness.

It may have been a half hour that Randall sat there on the grassy hill-slope, in silent contemplation of this picture upon which he had so surprisingly come. The time did not seem long to him, though he wondered that Joan did not grow restless. But pensive though she looked, she seemed very content to be sitting there in the still woodland, the sunshine glimmering through the big trees, the soft air on her cheek and hair, the child in her arms.

It occurred to him that it was odd she showed no sign of feeling his scrutiny upon her.

At last, when the shadows were beginning to lengthen a bit, Bappis stirred, yawned, stretched out his little legs and arms and opened his eyes upon the face above him.

"Oh! I dreamed Aunt Sally sent you away, Tante Joan!" His chubby arms clasped and hugged her as though he feared she might escape him if he did not hold her tight.

“Not yet, honey.”

Their voices reached Randall with remarkable distinctness.

“But you won’t go, *will* you? You love me and you’ll stay by me, won’t you?” he pleaded, with a wistfulness that stabbed his listening father with the sharp consciousness of his own responsibility for his boy’s motherless childhood.

“Do I love you? Oh, Bappis!” she softly answered, as suddenly she snatched him to her breast, pressed his flushed little face against her neck and kissed him with a passionate warmth which Randall knew, as he knew that his heart leapt at the sight, was as sincere, as spontaneous, as was the child’s feeling for her. Never again, after this instant, could he doubt the strange fact that this girl loved his little son with a motherliness as genuine as it was unaccountable. Why should she, with no appeal of kinship, love him like that? But the fact stood that she did. He could not think otherwise.

“Then you won’t go away, will you, if you love me?” insisted Bappis, a note almost of dread in his voice.

She murmured an answer, as she held him close, which Randall did not hear.

“But Aunt Sally says,” came Bappis’ reply, “that you don’t want to be with a little boy all the time—you want to be with the grown people.”

“I’d rather be with you, Bappis, than with any one in the whole world!”

“Because you love me?”



THEIR VOICES REACHED RANDALL WITH REMARKABLE DISTINCTNESS

"Because we love each other. You see you're the only person here, Bappis, that really does want me."

"And you're the only one that wants *me* and loves me."

"Except when your 'Obber' is here."

"But he isn't here hardly ever at all. And before you came I was always so lonesome! I can't bear it if you go away, Tante Joan!" he passionately protested. "I can't bear it *at all!*"

"I don't know how *I'm* going to bear it, Bappis."

"But, Tante Joan," Bappis suddenly demanded in a puzzled tone, "you've got an own really mother, haven't you? Aunt Sally says you have. Why don't you live with her? Don't you love her?"

"Ye—yes, Bappis. Of course. But we haven't any home."

"And I haven't any *own* home either. So I have to live at Aunt Sally's and sometimes at Uncle Duncan's in Annapolis. Obber and I used to have a home, too, long ago when I had an own mother."

"Bappis, do you remember your mother?"

"I don't remember her face," he answered slowly. "But I remember she liked me the way you do. Obber says she likes me *yet*. But she doesn't like him and that's why she won't live with us. I don't see why any one would not like Obber; do you?"

"Of course I don't, dear."

"Oh!" He suddenly sprang to his feet and faced her. "*I* know what! You ask Obber to get married to you the way he was to my mamma and then you and

I and Obber can all live together and have our really own home again! And your mother could come too—if you'd promise to love me better than you love her!"

"But if Obber should refuse me, dear, I'm afraid I should find it embarrassing!"

"I'll coax him for you! You just tell *me* if he says he won't do it and I'll try to persuade him to!"

Joan suddenly sprang up too, with a laugh, and shook out her skirts. "I think we shall have to get up a different plan from that, honey, for staying together! Come, now, it's high time you got home for your bath."

"Will *you* bathe me?" he demanded aggressively. "Because the new maid came after luncheon and I shan't let *her* bathe me!"

"Oh, did she?" said Joan surprised. "I didn't know Aunt Sally had engaged another one. Are you sure, Bappis?—did you see her?"

"Oh, yes, I saw her. Will you bathe me?"

"Is she white or black?"

"I didn't notice!" he impatiently answered. "Are you going to bathe me, Tante Joan?"

"On one condition, Bappis."

"I promise, I promise!" he glibly affirmed. "What must I promise?"

"That when your Aunt Sally needs me and I *can't* come to you, you won't howl."

"I won't promise that!"

"Yes, you will, honey—else I won't bathe you or come to you *any* time. You see, darling, Aunt Sally says I've got you so spoiled that every one in the house has to

suffer for it. Now, if you want me to stay here, don't you see we must not let our being so fond of each other annoy your aunt, or——”

They had strolled on beyond the curve of the hill, and Randall heard no more.

As after a judicious time, when they were out of sight, he rose and followed, at a distance, the path they had taken, he tried to decide whether that “condition” to which she had endeavored to make Bappis subscribe, had been made in the interest of the child's proper discipline; or in the interest of their prolonged companionship; or of the peace of the household; or, as seemed likely, in that of Joan's own security at Beechlands.

He found himself wishing intensely that the latter supposition did not seem, in view of her situation here, the most probable. He hated to associate her pure and unselfish affection for his loved child with any thought of her miserable parasitism.

VIII

HOWEVER much Judge Randall might speculate as to the Machiavelian disposition of Joan Laird, he never for an instant attributed to Catherine Tyson any subtlety in having gone from Beechlands to spend the week-end at a neighboring estate, just on the eve of his arrival.

"We never dreamed you'd be here, Arthur, or I shouldn't have let her go," Mrs. McCord, also unsuspecting, candidly lamented this apparently lost opportunity. "But she'll be back Sunday afternoon and you won't be going until Monday. I had just succeeded in persuading her to stay here over *next* week-end for your visit—and now you won't be here next week; it's *too* bad!"

"If she'll stay over, perhaps I *shall* come out again—for another canter up the beach," he consoled his sister, conscious that his own disappointment would have been a good deal keener but for the engrossing theme which his afternoon's walk through the woodland had given him to weigh and ponder.

"So Catherine didn't really look for me to-day," he said to himself with masculine obtuseness, "and I'd have sworn she would. She's not so observant as I thought her—or she'd have seen I wouldn't be able to keep away!—damn the sex! Well, perhaps it's better she's not here," he decided, not realizing the fact so clearly foreseen by the redoubtable Catherine, that his chagrin at finding her

flown would "lead him on" leagues beyond the point where her actual presence could have landed him.

However, there was something Miss Tyson had not foreseen and that was that her new friend would, at the moment of facing his disappointment, be so distracted by another matter looming big on his horizon as somewhat to miss the sting of her carefully premeditated absence.

At dinner that evening Randall found himself distinctly annoyed at being seated where he could not watch Joan, for he wanted to consider her in the light of his afternoon's experience—her countenance, her movements, her hands, any and everything that might reveal her—inasmuch as her personality had undergone to-day a somewhat chameleon change of color in his mind.

After dinner his purpose to have a talk with her seemed also about to be foiled by her prompt disappearance—when he bethought him to intercept her in what was probably a stealthy visit to Bappis.

He was not mistaken. In her swift flight up-stairs, he managed to meet and stop her at the first landing.

"You are going to the boy?"

"Yes—I was," she faltered, a startled surprise in her childishly appealing eyes.

"I want to have a talk with you this evening if you will be so good as to allow me? Shall we meet in the library presently?—say at half-past nine?"

"Certainly," she acquiesced, her tone a little breathless.

He bowed and stepped aside to let her pass on, when the sudden opening of a door upon the landing and the

appearance of Bappis' new black nurse, a sister to Dinah, the chambermaid, made him pause.

"The little stubborn-head won't go to sleep till *you* come, Miss Joan!" complained the girl, not at once seeing Judge Randall, but, as she caught sight of him, shrinking back abashed at her boldness. Then, being of the new order of self-assertive negroes, she instantly resented her own abjectness and grew pert.

"I told him *Gawd* was lookin' down at him when he cut up such didos and one of these here days He'd just lose His patience and then Bappis would *see* what'd happen! And Bappis he was scairt and he was just goin' to be good fur me when Dinah she had to talk in and say there *ain't* no *Gawd*. Dinah she's a 'Theist. She's always sayin' there *ain't* no *Gawd*. I always tell her *I* don't keer."

Joan passed the girl and walked on to Bappis' room.

Randall went down stairs to wait for her.

At half-past nine promptly, as he sat reading in the large book-lined library, Miss Laird presented herself.

"This is very kind of you," he courteously, though perfunctorily, remarked as he rose at her entrance. "Would you prefer going out doors? A walk on the beach in this moonlight might help us to thresh out the thing I must discuss with you."

"Very well."

He was glad the library opened on the side of the house where the family was not sitting. No use in Sally's being unnecessarily alarmed at the sight of his leading Miss Laird out for a moonlight stroll. No doubt Miss

Laird herself was astute enough not to wish to be seen, under such circumstances, by her apprehensive hostess.

"Now then," he announced as he gave her his arm in the pathway to the beach, "I have a bone to pick with you, Miss Laird."

She met this so like a child frightened at an impending rebuke, that Randall thought what a domineering brute her husband, if she ever married, would probably become, with such pliable material at his hand to make him such. It seemed to him impossible that he should not easily succeed in persuading this most acquiescent of individuals to consent to what he was about to urge, though he remembered very well his sister's having told him that Joan had refused a self-supporting position offered her by Hubert McCord.

"You are cutting me out!" he gravely complained.

"Oh, no! Bappis loves you best—of course he does!"

"Not he! I've lost first place and I demand redress."

"I'm sure you are mistaken, but if I *have* done such damage, I certainly hope," she murmured, "that I may be able to make reparation—if you will tell me how."

"There is only one way in which you can make it up to me."

"By going away?" she hastily asked in a low voice, and her quickness to decide that *that* was what he wished, struck her listener with the realization of how used she was to being asked, like poor "Jo" in "Bleak House," to "move on"—a realization, however, calculated to arouse contempt rather than pity.

"Yes," he answered. "By going away, and taking Bappis with you."

"'Taking Bappis'!" she repeated bewildered. "But how would that mend matters with *you*? Unless you think that the more Bappis sees of me the less he'll like me!"

He turned a sharp look upon her face just at his shoulder. Was the timid creature actually being playful with him? Her subdued, half-breathless tone, her pale, serious face, seemed a sufficient denial of his astonished suspicion.

"I've no such hope—or rather fear—as that. I yield you the first place—on condition that you come and live with us as his care-taker—at any salary you name—I should insist upon its being a large one, though I should value your service far beyond money, for it would enable me to open my house in Eastport once more and give Bappis what he and I both so much need—a home."

He spoke rapidly, in an instinctive effort to conceal his extraordinary eagerness to try once more what had so often failed—keeping house with only hired people to manage things. This time, however, it seemed to hold out a hope of success, in the unprecedented fact that one employee at least would be filling her place, the most important place in his *ménage*, with love in her heart for the object of her care.

She did not answer at once. Looking down upon her, he could see the deep, quick heaving of her bosom under her thin white gown and the trembling of her bare arm on his.

"You should be as free in your position—more free—than you are now," he went on, unable, in his eagerness, to keep quiet and give her time. "My house should be to you like your own home. Your only duty would be to—well, to mother Bappis. And of course you would be sufficiently chaperoned by the presence of the house-keeper whom I should employ."

He waited; but still, to his puzzled surprise, she did not answer. He had really supposed she would eagerly jump at it.

"You would have to do only what you seem to find so much enjoyment in doing here," he urged, "with the difference that you would be drawing a salary for doing it. You have made me feel, in your unrequited services to my boy this summer, like a recipient of charity."

"And how do you find it feels," she suddenly lifted her head and spoke with a repressed intensity, "to be a recipient of charity?"

He felt like answering, "You ought to know!"—for her delay in accepting this good thing he was offering her roused his impatience.

"I prefer paying my way," he replied, "and so I urge—no, I beg of you, Miss Laird,—to accept my proposal."

She seemed to consider it, as again, with downcast eyes, she silently walked at his side.

He paused to kick from her path a heavy bramble, with that unobtrusive yet so thoughtful and unfailing care for women which made him, with all his cynicism, so attractive to them.

"I am very anxious," he spoke again irrepressibly, "to hear your view of what I suggest."

"Judge Randall," she replied at last in a low voice, "you honor me very much with your willingness to trust me with Bappis—believe me, I appreciate it! But—it seems to me impossible."

"In heaven's name, why, Miss Laird? I should think you'd——" he checked, in time, his impetuous outburst.

"Jump at it?" she unexpectedly supplied the repressed clause.

"Well, why shouldn't you—so fond of Bappis as you are. Come, let me *hear* your objections."

"You may marry again," she timidly suggested.

"I shall not. But even if I did, you'd only be where you are now, having had a temporary home with the child you love to be with."

"I should never get back to where I am now if for a time I occupied a place in your home as nursery governess."

He turned this over to see just what she meant. Was she telling him in effect that should she drop her chain of visits, she could never again pick it up and restore the lost links?—that descending to the level of a hired governess would debar her from a certain prestige, small though it was, which was enjoyed by what you might call a professional guest?

"If you will stay with me until Bappis is old enough to go to boarding-school, I shall pension you until you marry."

"You are very rash! You might have me on your hands all my life as a pensioner!"

"I'll take the chance of that. It would be worth a great deal to me—more than, I have words to tell you, Miss Laird,—to have my little boy cared for over the next five or six years as I know you would care for him."

"Judge Randall," she said, her voice trembling, "I wish I could do what you ask!"

"What, in God's name, is there to prevent? Let me know—and I swear I'll override any obstacles you may name!"

"Your sister wouldn't approve."

"That would not affect *me*."

"I shouldn't like to offend her—after all her kindness to me."

"You care more for that than for Bappis' need of you?"

She seemed to have no answer for this.

"I am not mistaken, am I, Miss Laird, in assuming that you are not financially independent of the salary consideration?"

"No, you are not mistaken, Judge Randall."

"And your mother? Surely she would like it for you?"

She did not answer.

"Wouldn't it," he persisted, though hesitating to intrude too far upon her private affairs, "be a—a relief to your mother?"

"It ought to be," she faltered. "But—my mother is very proud, very ambitious."

"Too proud to have you honorably support yourself?" he inquired, gently incredulous.

She winced perceptibly; but he mercilessly added, "And you yourself are not proud?"

"Oh, *I!*" Her tone implied that such a negligible quantity was not to be taken into the account.

Again they walked in silence.

"Well?" he pressed her.

"I am deeply sorry to have to refuse you!" she faintly answered.

"Miss Laird, believe me, you are blind to your own best interests in refusing me."

She said nothing.

"You will not consider it?"

"I'm afraid I—I *can't*, Judge Randall!"

"You have not really given me any reason for your refusal, you know."

"I have none—that you would not consider paltry—inadequate."

"I am sure of that!" he retorted, his tone betraying an almost bitter disappointment.

She said nothing to this and they strolled on, the sands of the beach crackling under their footsteps.

They appeared to have come to the end of the matter, leaving no more to be said. Randall felt it to be almost an absurdity that he was powerless to influence, to conquer, this young person whom he had thought so pliable, so weakly ineffectual, "a negligible quantity." Was she, perhaps, like most weak, sappy characters—stupidly obstinate? She certainly seemed to have no common sense if she preferred this eternal sponging to a self-respecting life of usefulness.

"Then your answer is an unqualified refusal?" he coldly inquired.

"It must be."

"You are aware that your refusal must appear strange to me?"

"Yes?" she said with the faintest possible note of irony—a note that seemed to ask by what right he demanded that she account for herself to *him*?

He did not know what to make of the girl.

"Shall we go in now?" she inquired, turning about to retrace their steps before he could reply.

They did not talk on their way back, Randall feeling almost childishly aggrieved from the slight that he felt her refusal put upon Bappis, and she not seeming to feel called upon to keep up any conversation. Once, as her scarf slipped from her shoulder and he paused to replace it, his fingers touched her neck and he felt that she was feverishly hot. Quiet as she seemed, this interview had, evidently, greatly stirred her.

As they neared the piazza steps (having taken the precaution to return on the library side) they saw, to Randall's annoyance, Mrs. McCord standing alone at the railing, watching their slow and silent approach. Evidently (alert with apprehension as she was) the suspicious absence from the family circle of both Joan and himself had put her on the lookout. He hardened his heart against the pang of pity he instinctively experienced for Joan. Sally's displeasure was no slight thing to face. He felt a faintly amused curiosity to see what his sister

would do about it. If she couldn't manage Joan any better than *he* could!

The girl's violent start as she caught sight of her hostess awaiting her and the sudden pallor of her face as she went up the steps to meet her, caused Randall to wonder afresh why she should prefer an existence apparently so abominable, to accepting a home where she was needed and wanted and could hold up her head without shame or truckling.

"Bappis is crying for you—as usual!" Mrs. McCord freezingly informed her—and without replying, Joan sped indoors.

Randall, after lingering for an instant to give his sister the opportunity (which she proved too wise to take) to unburden her mind of what he knew must be weighing heavily upon it, also went indoors and upstairs to his bed-chamber, which adjoined Bappis' nursery.

IX

Mrs. McCord passed an uneasy night. If only Catherine had not gone away! Surely it was she who had brought Arthur back a week sooner than he had been expected and it must be his disappointment at her absence that was leading him to try to find consolation in Joan. It would be so like the stupidity of a man who was in a semi-softened state over one girl to find consolation in another who had so strong a claim to his regard as Joan's goodness to Bappis gave her. Apart from that of course Joan was not formidable.

"It was very careless, very short-sighted of me, to let her remain here to spoil the boy! I shall tell her to-morrow that she must leave on Monday. And until I've got Arthur safely married, I shall certainly not let her come here again."

Joan took it very quietly next day when told that her room would be needed immediately. She always took it quietly when asked to move on. But the pathetic whiteness of her face as she heard her sentence this morning stabbed Mrs. McCord with a sense of being cruel; and this sense, being an extremely uncomfortable one, reacted, in turn, against that which caused it; Mrs. McCord resented the fact that a beneficiary like Joan should have the power to cause her discomfort.

"I have let myself be annoyed with the girl quite often

enough!" she hardened her heart. "I shan't put up with it hereafter!"

That Sunday was a long day of watchfulness for Sally McCord, so fearful she was of her brother's erratic impulses; of his inordinate and blind love of his son. Scarcely could she wait for the next morning which should see Joan early on her way from Beechlands.

There was apparently, however, no further attempt or even inclination on the part either of Joan or Arthur to seek each other's society; and Arthur's more than usual moroseness and taciturnity all that day cheered Sally wonderfully, inasmuch as she was sure it was occasioned by Catherine's disappointing absence, for which, evidently, Joan had, after all, failed to prove a consolation.

It was shortly after luncheon that an idea occurred to her which she regarded as a veritable inspiration.

"Why don't you take a machine and go for Catherine, Arthur?" she suggested. "Mr. Allen Johnson was to bring her home in his car, I believe—but you can cut him out! It's not more than twenty miles from here."

To her joy, he quite eagerly agreed to her suggestion; and when she had seen him off, Bappis at his side rebellious at leaving Joan, she had such a reaction of kindness to the latter that she went indoors and made out a check to her for one hundred dollars—a larger gift than she had ever before offered her.

In the act of presenting it, however, she was seized with a qualm lest Joan should understand it to mean that she was trying to buy her off. She didn't of course wish to insult the girl; though for that matter, Joan wasn't

very easily insulted!—in spite of the fact that she *looked* so like a girl of fine feeling. But when, after an instant's crimson hesitation, the craven creature gratefully accepted the money, Sally dismissed from her mind all further concern for her.

Arthur and Catherine returned in time for tea and their radiant aspect, as they joined Sally and the other guests on the lawn, encouraged Mrs. McCord to hope for the best. Catherine even waxed caressingly gay with her usually cowed little mother.

"Now, Mother, really," she protested at some vagrant remark of Mrs. Tyson's, "what is three-quartered oak, about which you talk as familiarly as though you knew! You *don't* know, do you? I don't, I'm sure."

"It's what Isabel Johnson's floors are made of," Mrs. Tyson replied. "Three-quartered oak of the very best manufacture, she told me. Even for the window-sills and door-sills she would not use anything *less* than this excellent three-quartered oak, and very wise of her, I'm sure."

"Well, Mother, if I'm to belong to the same family with you, I've got to know more! What, I ask, is three-quartered oak?"

"I don't know what it is, my dear, but——"

"But," exclaimed Catherine, "you talk of it as though it were second nature to you!—as though you were perfectly at home with it. To think of being able to speak of such a thing at all—and then the *way* you speak of it—as a mere matter-of-course! And this morning with the same nonchalance," she appealed for sympathy to

Arthur, "wasn't she talking of—let me see!—'Thesaurus,' that was it—Thesaurus. It's so misleading to hear her! She'd only seen the name on a book-shelf in a shop! Three-quartered oak and Thesaurus, Mother!—and you don't know one from the other!"

"Stop teasing your mother," Arthur chid her, looking amused at her almost hysterically high spirits, while his nephew, Ned McCord, dumb with amazement at this transformed Catherine who was always so maddeningly languid and indifferent on *his* hands, deeply envied the marvellous power of his awe-inspiring Uncle Arthur to have wrought such a miracle.

"Did you enjoy your visit to Pine Hill, Catherine?" this gentle youth interposed, determining to get her attention. "Because I was sure you would not. Those Johnsons do keep such an untidy house!" he shuddered fastidiously. "The last time I was there I noticed their hall chandelier was quite disgustingly dusty!"

"Oh, Ned, who'd ever think of getting up to the ceiling to clean! I'd as lief think of dusting the stars!" she dismissed him with a laugh and turned her attention to his uncle.

"But, Catherine," he persisted, "you couldn't find them congenial!"

"Because their chandeliers aren't dusted?"

"Because Mrs. Johnson was a Northerner and speaks of Booker Washington as *Mr.* Washington, if you please! Just fancy! The woman boasts that 'Mr.' Washington once took her out to supper—*supper*—ON HIS ARM! She calls it an honor!"

"She knew better than to flaunt her Northern prejudices before *me*, anyway, and I had a perfectly lovely time, Ned, I assure you."

She turned so resolutely away from him that he sank back in his chair collapsed, and let her alone, save as his fascinated gaze continued to devour her to the exclusion of all else in sight.

Even a fresh relay of guests, Sally observed, did not have its usual effect of driving Arthur indoors, so happily absorbed he seemed in Catherine's radiant vivacity. In fact, when a half hour later he did ask to be excused, it was with Catherine's hand on his arm as he led her away for a moonlight stroll on the beach.

X

A LATE hour that night found Arthur Randall lounging in a steamer-chair on the moonlit piazza outside his bed-chamber, deep in meditation over his pipe.

He had come in from his walk on the beach with Catherine with his nerves tingling, his blood hot, his whole torpid being awakened. He knew, now, as he smoked and thought, that in dangling about with this girl, he was playing with live coals.

"I've got to get out of this, or next thing I'll be marrying that lily-faced, long-limbed, deep-bosomed creature!" he vindictively told himself—vindictive not towards Catherine, for whose beauty, indeed, he felt an aching tenderness; but vindictive towards the whole "hateful" power of sex which she embodied. Yet why call the power "hateful" when it was the very essence of life itself and the source of all ecstasy?

"It is the devil with which the Universe plays with us, uses us, lures us for its own ends to spend and wreck ourselves! Either the sex relation is an anachronism in our highly refined civilization—or else we are educated in an utterly false, artificial attitude towards it!"

But the very intensity of his feeling revealed to him with what an iron will he would have to hold himself.

Gazing out upon the wide horizon, he determined, with strong and deep resolve, that of just one thing he would not, so long as ever he breathed, lose sight. The happi-

ness of his little son, defrauded of his mother's love, must forever come before all else in his life.

Therefore, to save himself from the tide so irresistibly tugging at him, to safeguard Bappis from another and greater wrong—he would take a step which would put Catherine and all women of her ilk absolutely out of his life. Yes, to insure Bappis' safety he would sacrifice himself.

The perfectly calm, cold blood with which he made his resolve, was in exact proportion to the fierceness of the desire awakened in him that night by the beauty and charm of the woman whom, for his son's sake, he knew he must not marry.

"I will ask Joan Laird to become Bappis' step-mother. Not my wife—I'll make no pretences, no false vows. My legal wife only. For Bappis' sake I shall do it!"

It was of course the haunting picture he bore in his heart of Joan's spontaneous tenderness to the boy when supposing herself unobserved, that made him feel safe in taking this extraordinary step. To be certain of the sincerity of her affection for Bappis was all that was essential. Even though her moral fibre might not be of the sort he would prefer in his son's mother, her love for the child would always hinder her, he was sure, from doing him any harm. And she *would* love him. That was the point. He would be cherished almost as his own mother would have cherished him.

"I owe it to him. This girl somehow makes him happy and he wants her. I'll give her to him if I can!"

It would at least insure the boy's not having a step-mother who would not love him.

As for Joan's consenting to enter into such an alliance as he would propose, of course there was much doubt. When he should frankly explain to her that he made no pretence of being in love with her, nor of asking any least thing from her in the way of sentiment; that their "marriage" should be a business engagement purely; a repetition of his offer of last night with the additional bestowal of his name and all that that externally involved; that each of them should be as free personally as now; when she should understand that by the terms of this contract she could make no sentimental claims upon him for his devotion, his confidence, his companionship—all that goes to make up wedded union; that he would have none of these to give her, nor would he exact aught of her save a motherly care of Bappis—what sane woman would consent to such a compact?

"Oh, pshaw!" he impatiently told himself, "just as if women are not all the time marrying on just such a basis as that!"

All the same it did not seem at all likely that she would do other than spurn his proposition.

He decided to postpone his departure from Beechlands until he had put his case to the test and had settled the matter one way or the other—which he would do immediately.

"If she does accept me there'll be a pretty row with Sally!" he thought ruefully. "I don't see, however, why

Sally should object so much. Joan is quite as well-born as we are and I've plenty of money."

Socialist and radical though he was, his pride of family would never have allowed him to bestow his name upon one of inferior birth. Intuitively he put a value upon good blood only short of that which a man puts upon the virtue of women. Joan filled the bill in this regard at least.

He had reached this point in his reflections as he sat smoking on the piazza, when a startling sound smote his ear—the sound of low, passionate sobbing. Alarmed, he laid his pipe aside, sat upright and listened. It was a full minute before he located the repressed but deep sobs as coming from Bappis' room, the French window of which opened upon the piazza where he lounged.

For a moment longer he sat still and listened; then slowly he rose, and going to the screened window, looked into the room lit only by moonbeams. The sobbing ceased with the sound of his footstep. The room was now silent and, save for Bappis asleep on his bed, apparently empty. But after an instant, his eye adapting itself to the dimness, the objects within began to appear more distinct, and soon he discovered on the bed at Bappis' side, lying at full length, a figure in a loose pink robe—evidently a woman or girl wearing a kimona or negligé. The nurse-girl? Surely not Joan?

He opened the screen door and went into the room. The figure beside the sleeping boy lay motionless as he approached the bed. Not until he was close to her could he make out that it really was Joan, her face buried in the pillow, her brown braids hanging down her back. Such

apparently unstudied grace of posture and line, from her small pink bed-slippers to the prettily dishevelled crown of brown hair, was suspiciously suggestive of Catherine's cold-blooded, "Always in the public eye."

He noted also, casually, that the pink silk negligé which she wore was not only a very beautiful, but an extremely elegant robe.

"Miss Laird?"

At once she was on her feet before him, her flushed, tear-stained face and swollen eyes sufficient denial of his suspicion.

"Judge Randall!—I was just—saying good-night," she faltered, her lips quivering, "to Bappis—for the last time. I go to-morrow morning."

He looked down into her quivering face, his tall, broad-shouldered frame towering above and over her slight figure in the loose, graceful robe of rose pink.

"You 'go'?"

"Yes."

"But where?"

"I—I don't know."

"And you came here to say a last good-night to my little boy?"

"I couldn't sleep. I—I can't *bear* it—going away from him!"

"Does he know?"

"I *couldn't* tell him!"

"Why are you going?"

"Cousin Sally needs my room." Her reply was given scarcely above a whisper.

"Ah!"

"She told me this morning."

"Why do you care for Bappis in this extraordinary way?"

"Oh! He is something to love—and he cares for *me*!"

Again he looked down upon her for an instant in thoughtful silence.

"Come out with me to the piazza," he motioned to the French window. "Will you? I have something to say to you."

She hesitated. "Not what we discussed last night?" she asked, drawing back as though fearful of being coerced.

"Not what we discussed last night, Miss Laird."

As he held open the screen door for her to pass out, he picked up from the foot of Bappis' bed a white shawl which, as soon as she was seated, he laid about her shoulders. Then, seating himself before her, he took his pipe from the balcony railing where he had left it.

"I may smoke?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you. I have a strange request to make of you, Miss Laird," he gravely began, as he relit the pipe.

She waited in silence to hear it.

"You are sure you are not sleepy? It is late."

"I'm not sleepy. But—if it is so late—Cousin Sally would be shocked——" She hastily tucked her braids under the white shawl and childishly pulled the negligé over her pink bed-slippers.

The imagined picture of Sally's consternation at the situation made Randall grin broadly.

"I'll take care of 'Cousin Sally,'" he reassured her. "Now then,"—he drew a short, sharp breath—"for the plunge! Miss Laird, would you for an instant consider entering into a compact with a man violently averse to love and marriage—a compact by which you would fill the situation I outlined to you last night with the difference that you would do it under the condition of being my legal wife, bearing my name and taking a wife's place at the head of my home? I am aware," he hastily proceeded, "that such a proposition must come to you with a shock. My justification for making it is our mutual love for Bappis and—pardon me—your apparent homelessness. It seems to me that you and I can be so helpful to each other that it comes to our really *needing* each other. I see, of course, the serious objections, on your side, to such a marriage—it would stand forever in the way of your marrying where you could give yourself—and where you would be given what every girl of course looks forward to having some time—a man's love. You would have to consider this very thoroughly before you decided that it did not outweigh the advantages of the proposition."

In the moonlight her dark eyes gleamed big with astonishment and he saw her bosom heave and fall deeply under the white shawl.

"But you too," she presently breathed, "would be hindered from marrying again where you could—'give yourself.'"

"That's just what I want—to be so situated that I can't be tempted to give Bappis a step-mother—any other step-mother, that is, than you who love him. You see, I

am perfectly frank with you. It would be a *mariage de convenance* purely. The advantage to me—to Bappis and me—would be unspeakable. To you—it is for you to decide what it would be to you.”

He leaned back in his chair and smoked to give her time to think.

“Your sister would be wild!” she half whispered.

“I’d take care of that.”

“You are sure,” she tremblingly inquired, “that you would never regret it?”

“Never so long as you were a good girl and made Bappis happy.”

“I would do my best!” she said fervently—and his heart leapt with eagerness at this hint of the success of his plea—though it really did seem passing strange that she should consent to it. The position she had refused last night appeared to him infinitely preferable for her to what he was offering her now.

“I, in my turn,” he said, “would leave nothing undone to make you happy and comfortable, Miss Laird.”

She was silently thoughtful for a moment.

“Judge Randall,” she finally spoke in a low voice, “I accept your proposal.”

“Ah!” he exclaimed, impulsively triumphant; he could scarcely credit his good fortune, while at the same time a misgiving as to the girl’s motive in so promptly rising to his bait stirred his heart. Wasn’t it very unnatural that she should be willing to so sacrifice herself for a child not her own? For a sacrifice he regarded it.

"You realize all that it involves?" he earnestly inquired.

"I think I realize," she slowly answered.

"And you will go into it without any regrets?"

"I think I shall be very happy—as Bappis' mother—in a home of my own."

"You have no scruple," he gravely, a bit hesitatingly, asked, "about my being—divorced, I suppose, seeing my marriage with you would be legal merely—a partnership entered into by you and me solely because of our love for Bappis?"

"No, I have no scruples about your being divorced."

He wondered whether, if she knew the secret history of that divorce she would still have no scruples. Probably not; apparently, all she wanted was to *get* him—or rather, not him, but a home and an income and the child to love and coddle. He was sure—very sure he insistently told himself—that the child was the strong factor for her in the situation—in spite of her refusal to become his governess.

"For God knows I'm not offering *myself*! I hope to the Lord she understands!"

She seemed to him so childlike, or so stupid—he did not know which—that he half feared she did *not* take in his idea.

"All that remains, then, to decide, Miss Laird," he finally said, "is how soon you can be ready to stand up with me before a squire or a parson—the choice being of course with you."

His words sounded to himself so unlikely that he half

dreaded to see her, now that she heard it brought down to reality like that, shrink back and withdraw from the thing.

"I should like," he added, "to take you and Bappis home to Eastport just as soon as you can get ready."

"I am ready now—as soon as you wish."

"You won't have to get some clothing—a trousseau?"

"No," she answered hastily. "You will want the—the marriage ceremony—to be perfectly quiet of course?"

"As quiet as possible."

"And we shall go at once to your home at Eastport?"

"Of course. At once."

"Then I shan't need to buy any clothes."

"We need only wait, then, long enough to have my house got in readiness and some servants engaged. Let us fix the day two weeks from to-morrow."

"Very well."

She spoke quietly, but her tone was tense, her face flushed, her eyes luminous.

"Meantime," he suddenly bethought himself to inquire, "where shall you stay?"

"I—I don't know."

"You don't want to go to your mother?"

"N—no."

"You will want your mother to be present at the ceremony?"

"She would expect to be present."

"Naturally. We must arrange for that then. You have no preference as to *where* the ceremony shall take place?"

"No. Any place that suits you best, Judge Randall."

"Is your trunk packed to leave in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Unpack it. You will have to stay on here until all these details are arranged. I'll fix it with Sally—don't worry about that. I shall stay here too, for a day or two."

"Very well."

There was an instant's silence between them.

"I am deeply thankful, Miss Laird," he then said, "that you see your way to accepting my offer."

"And I thank you, Judge Randall, that you feel you can trust me with what is so dear to you."

"It is a compact then!" he smiled upon her. He laid down his pipe and rose. "I must not keep you up longer—it is very late—you must be getting to bed."

She, too, rose at once. He held out his hand to her. "I hope," he said as she passively gave him hers, "that you won't change your mind over night!"

"Maybe you will change yours," she timidly suggested.

For answer, he raised her hand to his lips. "There, now, little mother of Bappis, we've sealed it—you and I—and it's absolutely settled. Good-night!" he clasped her fingers for an instant, then dropped them and held open the screen door for her.

"Good-night," she quietly answered as she passed him and went indoors.

"Well!" he thought as, alone on the piazza, standing at the railing and looking out into the moonlit night, his pipe hanging cold and dead from his fingers, "I wonder just what I *have* let myself in for!"

XI

It was a long, hard, almost a bitter struggle that Randall had next morning with his sister. She would not understand; his explanations did not explain; she could not be reconciled to her disappointment; she thought him well-nigh out of his mind to be wedding a girl whom he admitted he did not in the least care for; whom, indeed, he not only did not know, but did not care to know; to be giving his already spoiled son a step-mother who made a slave of herself for him and whose palpable weakness of character could not possibly be good for the boy; to be cutting himself off from the possibility of some time finding happiness for himself once more!

"You who always so despised weak-kneed people of every sort, Arthur!" she finally exclaimed, almost maddened by the cool, quiet resolution with which he met her violent opposition, her passionate protesting.

"My marital experience with force of character, Sally dear, led me to the conviction that a gentleman cannot safely wed with it. Feminine force of character can be adequately dealt with only by day-laboring men who have no scruples about meeting it with the only thing that's a match for it—brute strength; a weapon which a gentleman is (sometimes unfortunately) debarred from using."

"You might see for yourself, Arthur, that if Joan had a spark of proper feeling she'd regard such a proposal as you say you made to her as insulting! Instead of

that she *accepts* you! Enters into so sacred a relation as marriage for the sake of securing a home and an income!"

"A proceeding unheard-of," said Randall, "in all the annals of history!"

They were in his bed-room, Sally seated in an arm-chair by the window, her brother slowly pacing the floor.

"But you are wronging the girl herself to lead her into such a false relation—if she's too young or too stupid to keep out of it herself."

"Do you really think it's so very stupid, Sally, for a girl in her plight to accept my offer of marriage?"

Sally was silent.

"You'd think her mighty stupid if she didn't jump at it! Oh, I know you!" he patted her cheek in passing. "You'd think any woman a fool who refused to marry your wonder of a brother under any conditions he might choose to offer her! That's what *you* think, old girl!—though remember I don't share your opinion the least little bit."

But Sally was not to be cajoled.

"Suppose in daily contact with you she comes to love you (which she's almost bound to do, Arthur!)—and you can't return it?"

"We shall have to take our chances of catastrophes like that—though there's no more likelihood of her falling in love with me than of my falling in love with her. At the same time," he said slowly, as he paused before her, his hands in his pockets, his thoughtful gaze on the blue sky and the dancing waters outside, "I don't dislike the

girl. Her affection for Bappis will always insure my at least *liking* her and being her staunch friend. And it really seems to me, you know, that Bappis is a quite sufficient bond of union between Joan and me. If through this she misses married happiness—well, I'd sacrifice a dozen Joans for Bappis!"

"A beautiful prospect for her!"

"There will be compensations for her. I shall take care that there are."

"Arthur, you have made serious missteps in your life—this one is going to be the worst you've ever made!"

"It may be! Most of us don't learn how to live until it's time to die. 'Providence' seems to have no more use for us by the time she's taught us how to dodge the pitfalls of life."

Sally sighed despairingly. But even with the last shred of hope departing, a sudden inspiration came to her. Suppose, if she apparently made the best of it, and consented to his urgent request that she let Joan remain here for another week (which she had flatly refused to do) might she not after all be much more likely to find opportunity for breaking up this absurd project than if she drove the wretched girl away? Arthur was unmistakably attracted by Catherine. Keep all three of them here for a week—and the contrast which her brother must daily witness between the brilliant, fascinating woman who so obviously charmed him and the insignificant little creature on whom he was about to bestow his name—and surely he would see his folly and back out of it! And meantime, Sally would herself bring to bear upon

Joan the whole force of her own strong will to make her give up this most unsuitable marriage—unsuitable at least for her brother. Yes, since she could not dissuade Arthur, she must use other means, however extreme, to stop him, to save him from himself.

Almost cheered by this sudden light upon the darkness that had encompassed her, she turned to her brother with a smile and held out her hand.

“Since I can’t move you—well, of course Joan must stay on.”

He held her hand, but he regarded her with half amused suspicion.

“Your surrender is too sudden!” he shook his head sceptically. “Your promise, Sally, that you will say no word to Joan to make her back out!”

Sally rapidly reflected that there were other means of influencing Joan than by “words.” So, reluctantly she gave the promise.

“I will say no word to influence her.”

Still he looked doubtful.

“You trust me, Arthur?”

His grave eyes met hers as his fingers caressed her forehead. “I have your word, dear.”

After that she would have cut out her tongue before she would have broken her word. But her resolution to bear hard upon Joan by any and every means save “words” was not in the least weakened.

“However, I make a condition, Arthur dear.”

“A ‘condition’? Well?”

“That you prohibit Joan from announcing this silly

engagement for one week and that neither of you tell a living soul. Absolute secrecy for one week is the condition on which I consent to keep the girl here."

"And your reason for this secrecy?"

"Only that I am in hopes you will come to your senses before it is too late."

"If that's all I am perfectly willing to keep the thing a secret for a week."

"And you will lay your command upon Joan?"

"My 'command,' dear! But I'm not a Turk! I'll request her not to tell. She will of course have no reason for refusing."

"She will be only too eager to announce such a triumph!"

"Well, I can't gag her!"

"You won't vouch for her silence? Then, Arthur, she goes."

"Nonsense, dear! There, there, I vouch! 'At the peril of my high and sublime displeasure, humble maid, you divulge our secret betrothal!' That'll keep her down, don't you think?" ..

"I should think it might!" She rose, smiling, and led the way down stairs to breakfast; and Randall, though almost worn with the long, hard battle he had had, felt, as he followed her, really buoyant with his apparent complete success.

XII

PASSING a piazza door as he followed Sally towards the dining-room, Randall caught sight of his favorite nephew, Artie, outside on the lawn, sprawled on the grass, with Bappis lying at his side.

He stepped out to tell them to come in to breakfast.

"Here you!" Artie was poking his little cousin, as the latter lay stretched out with closed eyes, motionless. "Wake up!"

"I can't! I'm dead!" said Bappis, keeping his eyes tightly closed, while his father stopped for a moment by the piazza railing.

"You're not! Get up!"

"I am. I have a pain."

"Aw, sit up and tell me what you're going to name your new pony."

Bappis sat up. "*Salvia*, after a song Tante Joan sings me—'Who is *Salvia*?' She's my pony *now*."

"'Salvia'? *Saliva*, I guess you mean."

"Tante Joan doesn't say it that way," said Bappis doubtfully.

"Call her Spit for short!"

"All right!" Bappis assented enthusiastically.

"Come in to breakfast, you two," Randall spoke from the top of the steps; and as he turned about to go indoors again, he confronted Joan, in a fresh, white morning frock, just coming out.

Two things he was dreading to encounter this morning—Joan's withdrawal from their agreement or, almost worse, her treating their compact with any hint of coyness or nearness, or as any other than a purely business one. He was prepared to fend off, by his own manner, any approach to warmth in hers. She *must* understand just what she was letting herself in for.

"Good-morning," he said formally, holding out his hand.

"Good-morning," she gravely answered as she gave her own, her greeting just exactly as formal as his.

"Did you rest?" he asked, searching her face for a clue to her mind as to this strange relation between them, but finding her customary demure mask untouched, save for an added brightness, almost a glitter, in her dark and really beautiful eyes as she looked up at him. "Or did our little talk last night give you too much to think about to let you sleep?"

"I rested a little, thank you."

"And you feel, this morning, just as you did last night, about it, I hope?"

"Yes. Unless—unless *you* have thought better of it?" she asked, and he realized a note of anxiety in her voice and in the slight lift of her brows.

"I think mighty well of it! And I am glad the morning light has not given you a different view."

"And—and Cousin Sally?—I am to stay?" she faltered, flushing rather painfully.

"Of course. That's all settled. But my sister imposes secrecy upon us for one week."

"I may write my mother?"

"That certainly. No one else, however. Just for a week, you understand."

"Yes."

"You are willing?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you," he said.

She asked no explanation of the promise. Perhaps she understood it only too well!

"Any time you want to consult me," he added, "as to any aspect of this whole matter, come to me freely."

"Yes, Judge Randall, thank you."

As they all went in to breakfast, Randall just missed seeing the morning encounter between Joan and his sister, for which he had been on the lookout. Joan's seat at the table, he found as he took his own place, had been changed to the extreme end of the side on which he sat; so that he could not conveniently either see or speak with her. Catherine was given the place opposite him. Poor Sally was evidently, in the short space of a week, going to, as Artie would say, "do her darndest" to "save" her brother! Well, it was a tug of war between them! He admitted, with Catherine before him fresh and gleaming from her morning toilet, yet reposeful and indifferent as always, that Sally was not without weapons.

After breakfast he went to his room and spent the morning in writing letters to arrange for the opening of his home in Eastport and all other adjustments necessary to his impending marriage.

It was after luncheon, when all the household had

strolled out to the piazza on the shady side of the house to get a bit of fresh air before retiring for an afternoon siesta, that, lounging against a porch pillar as he lit his pipe, his eye fell upon Joan a few yards away, helping Bappis tie a long and short stick together to form a sword, and he realized at once that she was very pale and that the brightness and glitter of her eyes which had so struck him that morning was changed to a lifeless dullness. What had Sally been doing to her? But his sister had given him her promise that she would utter no word to influence Joan. What, then, was the girl looking so forlorn about?

He was about to go to her, when a light step and the swish of a skirt behind him caused him to turn the other way. Catherine, on the other side of the pillar against which he leaned, the gentle breeze from the bay stirring the vagrant curly locks about her delicately flushed face, drove from his mind, for the time, his troubled impression of Joan. He strolled around the pillar to her side.

"Instead of a nap, I'm going to take a canter up the bay," she announced.

"Too hot."

"Cooler than bed."

"Well, perhaps. Ned going with you?"

"Don't suggest it in his hearing! He'd spoil the view by spouting his own verses all along the road! I'm going alone."

"You like riding alone?"

"Better than riding with dear Ned—seeing he insists upon making love even on horseback."

"Ned's poetry combined with his love-making would mar any view!" granted Randall. "I happened to overhear him confiding to Artie last night that he had 'thrice' offered you his 'hand' and that if yet once again you refused it—'Offer her your foot!' broke in Artie; upon which poor Ned spoke of a loaded revolver in his room which anon should end his misery! So you'd better ease up a bit with the poor lad—we don't want a family tragedy, you know!"

"You won't mention to him my going riding, then, *will* you? He'd be certain to propose again."

"My *car*eer, Miss Tyson, has been checkered, but I've never been known to do a cruel deed!"

"The point is, can I get away without his seeing me? Really," she said, looking up at him with the lazy little laugh which so fascinatingly revealed the whiteness of her teeth, "I need a body-guard when Ned's about!"

He smoked without replying. She waited a moment—(was she waiting for him to offer himself as her body-guard?)—then she remarked casually, "You're taking quite a holiday, aren't you? You don't often stay here after Monday morning, do you?"

"Not often."

"Is it the weather or the company that keeps you?"

"The company," he bowed to her. "And business."

"Business out here?"

"More pressing than any in town."

"Ah? How long *are* you going to be with us?"

"Until I've finished the business I'm here for."

Her languid eyes turned upon him slowly. Was she

perhaps thinking (with diabolical feminine perspicacity as to the state of his mind) that *she* was the business which kept him here?

"Are you going to be occupied with your business this afternoon?" she asked.

"Not if you'll ask me to go riding with you."

She considered it. "Well—you wouldn't spout poetry to me——"

"Not my own, at all events."

"Or——"

"Or?" he challenged her.

"Or make love to me——"

"You can't be sure of that!" he shook his head ruefully.

"You may come with me."

"You'll risk it?"

"I don't think I'm risking anything;" she turned away to go indoors; "I shall start at four."

"I'll order the horses for both of us then," he answered; and she nodded, smiling, and strolled across the piazza.

Randall, all thought of Joan and her pallid, troubled aspect departed from him, went down to the stables to give his orders.

XIII

It was so late when they returned from their ride that as their horses drew up to the piazza steps, nearly the entire household, arrayed festively for dinner, was assembled there awaiting the summons to the dining-room.

Mrs. McCord, in a low-necked black silk gown scintillating with jet, stood beaming at the head of the steps to greet them. Joan, in a door-way, a little apart from the rest of the company, was dressed as usual in the monotonous simplicity she affected, and it occurred to Randall, as his eye fell upon her, that in these perfectly plain but exceedingly dainty and fine white frocks she wore, she looked so like a nice, clean, sweet baby that, by contrast with the dazzling woman in whose brilliancy he had been basking for the past few hours, she seemed so insipid as to be indeed "a negligible quantity" except in so far as she was useful for Bappis.

"Now fly, both of you, or you'll be horribly late to dinner!" Mrs. McCord tenderly admonished the riders.

Catherine obediently flew; but Randall stopped to lift Bappis to her saddle to ride with the groom to the stables.

As he turned to come up the steps, Joan, coming forth from the door-way and looking on with a smile at Bappis' excited delight, did not meet her prospective husband's eye; and he, not pausing to speak to her, hurried into the house.

It was just as well, he reflected, as he hastily bathed and dressed, that Joan should have this very good schooling in realizing how perfectly free he meant to be in his formal marriage with her.

With this thought in his mind, he did not hesitate, after dinner, to invite Catherine to a stroll with him on the moonlit beach. Joan had just returned to the piazza from seeing Bappis to bed, as he led Catherine away.

"Oh, by the way," Catherine remarked when they were out of ear-shot, "Joan Laird told Mother to-day a most astonishing thing!"

"What was that?" Randall quickly inquired.

"That she was obliged to cancel the engagement she had made to visit Mother next week while I'm at Bar Harbor! Never before, I'll take my oath, has she declined an invitation for a fortnight's visit, and if I were the least interested in her, I should really be curious to know what such an unprecedented incident signifies! Mother probed her for her reason, but she couldn't get a thing out of her. Like all over-sweet people, she's obstinate."

Randall was smoking as they walked and he did not reply, but continued to pull on his pipe.

"Do you think her pretty?" Catherine surprisingly inquired.

"In an infantine sort of way, yes."

"It isn't a way you care for?"

"Oh! I'm not particular."

"Not particular"! *You!* Angels and ministers of grace!"

"Well?"

"Your taste in women is fastidious to a fault!"

"You ought to be flattered, then, that I so manifestly do not despise *your* style of looks!"

"It isn't my looks—it's—well, magnetism, perhaps!" she laughed. "Joan Laird hasn't a bit."

"Of magnetism? Now do you know," he said slowly, "I don't agree with you. I've been actually struck with the fact that however insignificant she may superficially seem, one is always conscious of her presence. To feel the presence of one who contributes so little in the way of talk, self-assertion or self-revelation, argues, I should say, a personality of some magnetism."

"You always will stand up for her!"

"Yes," he said, blowing out a long line of smoke.

"Why?"

"She's good to Bappis."

Catherine laughed. "You dear, simple man!"

"You mean to imply that I'm being worked?"

"Her fussing over Bappis is so *ridiculous*!"

"Bappis likes it."

"But it's so insincere—it's such a sham!"

"I happen to know better. To *know*, mark you!"

"You are very credulous—for a judge!"

"See!" He waved his pipe toward the gleaming waters of the Bay. "See the 'vee-yew,' as Bappis calls it," he resolutely steered her away from the subject of his affianced wife; and having got her off the theme which under the circumstances was so impossible to him, he saw to it that for that night at least they did not return to it.

Again it was late when they got back to the house; so late that the piazza was empty and the house silent, though there were lights at the windows.

Yet they still lingered for a moment on the porch before going indoors.

"Talk about magnetism!" she laughed softly as they stood together looking out over the lawn. "You're the first man I believe I've ever known that I could spend so many hours with and not be bored to death!"

"Yet we haven't three ideas in common. The more we talk, the more we realize it."

"Is it necessary that we *should* have any ideas in common?"

"Necessary to what?"

"Necessary to our enjoying each other," she answered, looking at him with a softness in her usually cold eyes that set his heart to pounding.

"I confess," he said gently, "that I like you well enough to wish you might be a bit in sympathy with what seem to me some of the big things of life."

"Oh! What could be bigger than this?" she breathed, extending wide her hands to the stars. "This perfect night and—and you and I alone in it!"

He stood motionless, without speaking. There was an instant's pause. She was very near to him—so near that her dark hair glistened just at his shoulder, he caught the fragrance of her clothing and felt the heaving of her bosom. She suddenly bent forward in front of him to pluck a morning-glory bud from the vine which grew around the piazza, and her head and bare shoulder brushed

his coat. Instantly his arm was about her, pressing her cheek to his breast. She did not resist. He lifted her chin and kissed her lips. She yielded to him rapturously.

"Oh!" she murmured, her face close to his, "I didn't *know* a mere kiss could be so—so—so—kiss me again!"

"You're outrageous, you know!" he whispered, obeying her. "I ought to tell your mother! You shouldn't *allow* me to kiss you!"

"You wouldn't do it if you did not love me!"

"There you are wrong. I don't kiss you because I love you, but because you make me!"

"The woman tempted me and I did sin'? Bah!"

"Exactly. So she did. Why do you do it? That's what I'm curious to know."

"I couldn't make you—or even 'tempt' you—could I?—if you didn't like me well enough to *want* to do it! You don't kiss—well, Joan, for instance!"

"Are you in the habit of inviting every man who doesn't 'bore' you to kiss you?"

"Don't be jealous. You are the only one. That's really true, Arthur."

"And being a spoiled child, accustomed to have whatever you want,—well, I think my only safety lies in getting back to town!"

He deliberately took her by the shoulders and gently but firmly put her away from him.

"If I find I miss you very much when you are gone," she said, "I'll make Mother engage quarters for us at your hotel in town."

"I'm afraid Bappis would not accept you as a step-mother."

"Bappis and I get along very well together."

"I have never seen you 'together.'"

"I don't spoon over him when you are about. My methods are more open."

"And Joan's 'methods' are cryptic? Why do you call me credulous, then, for not seeing through them?"

"Her methods are indirect, not cryptic. They are like everything else about her, Arthur—subtle, secretive, self-interested. I seem to be the only one who sees through her!"

"I'll tell you what, Catherine—there's just one thing about that little girl that interests me—and of that one thing I happen to know more than you do. Now come! Let's say good-night. I think Ned, from his chamber-window, saw me kissing you and is getting his gun."

"His pen rather. He will compose a thriller on such a theme!" she affirmed as together they went into the house; she, radiant, triumphant; he resolving that as soon as possible he would flee from her; that if he did not, he could not much longer answer for himself.

In the seclusion of his bed-chamber, he concluded that the only thing which had saved him to-night from really "making love" to Catherine Tyson, in deadly earnest, was his betrothal to Joan.

"The sooner I'm married to her, the better for Bappis, by Jove!" he exclaimed in desperation, as he tossed upon a sleepless bed.

XIV

✓ AFTER breakfast next day Randall, retiring with his mail to an alcove of the library, chanced to witness a little encounter between Joan and Catherine which threw light not upon Joan, but upon Catherine. Nothing seemed to illumine Joan. He had wondered that very morning, as they were leaving the breakfast table in the midst of a rather hot discussion on some current political problem, what really were her thoughts behind that mask of her placid, inscrutable face. A regular *Mona Lisa*! Then he shrugged at supposing she ever thought at all.

“If she does, she never gives a sign of it!”

And yet, by Jove!—as he had told Catherine last night, one did feel the girl somehow!

He had not been long in his alcove when Catherine, coming into the library, sat down by a window with some embroidery. He was glad he was not within her line of vision, as he wanted to attend to his mail without interruption. Even her unconscious presence made it hard for him to keep his mind and his eyes off her.

“The devil’s to pay if I don’t get away from Beechlands!” he growled to himself.

A moment later a step at the other end of the room made him glance up, to see Joan, an open letter in her hand, walk slowly and absently to the window where Catherine was and seat herself near her.

At once Catherine rose and took a chair at the opposite

window with her back to Joan. So far as Randall could see, Joan seemed entirely unaffected by this snub; she didn't appear even to see it, so intent she was upon her letter.

But presently Bappis, never far from his foster-mother, found her here in the library.

"See what Cousin Artie gave me!" he cried, holding up a pack of chocolate cigarettes.

"Lovely! Going to smoke one?"

"Going to smoke them all."

"Only one now, dear, and another after luncheon and another after your supper."

"No-sir-ee! I'm going to smoke and smoke and smoke all morning until I've smoked them all up!"

"One after each meal, dear."

"Ah—h, Tante Joan!" he demurred irritably, "I want to smoke all of them *now*! I'm *going* to!" he defied her, though with a look and tone of uncertainty.

"Let me take care of them, dear—all but one. Won't you? You will be ill, you know, if you eat them all at once."

"Bappis, dear," Catherine's voice, speaking very sweetly as she turned to the boy, here interposed. "Cousin Artie gave the cigarettes to you—ask your *father* whether you may not keep them! Of *course* he'll let you!"

But Bappis ignored her.

"Ah—h, Tante Joan, mayn't I keep them?"

"If you'll smoke only one."

Catherine turned further in her chair and addressed Joan, her manner and tone formally polite.

"Why do you tease the child?—and make him un-

happy? His father would let him have the cigarettes."

"Obber would let me have them, Tante Joan!" Bappis echoed coaxingly. "*Please* let me have them!"

"Only one, dear."

"I'm *going* to smoke them all!"

"No, Bappis."

"What will you do if I do?"

"You won't smoke them."

"Dear me!" broke in Catherine, her voice very soft and gentle, "Judge Randall gives you such authority as this over Bappis—to *punish* him when he doesn't obey you?"

"We seem to be disturbing Miss Tyson, Bappis,"—Joan suddenly rose and held out her hand to the child. "Let us go out and feed the chickens. And," she added as he gladly sprang to her hand and they strolled together out of the room, "you will let me give you the cigarettes one at a time, won't you? Such a lot of chocolate would give you that horrid feeling in your tummy that you had last Monday, don't you remember?—when you'd eaten half that box of candy that Cousin Ned gave Miss Tyson?"

They disappeared, and Catherine, looking baffled, returned to her embroidery.

Randall stuffed his mail into his pockets, emerged from the alcove and came across the floor to her.

"Oho!" she greeted him with a startled surprise, "so you were eavesdropping! I'd have thought you above it!"

He threw himself into a chair beside her, crossing his legs and thrusting his hands into his pockets.

"Look here, Catherine! What's the reason you bully and snub that poor little helpless thing the way you do?"

“‘Helpless’? I really thought her rather a match for me just now, didn’t you?”

“I was extraordinarily glad that she didn’t knuckle to you, you little bully! And that she stood firm with Bappis!”

He had watched Joan’s match with Bappis in an almost breathless dread of her giving in to the boy. He had several times in the past few weeks noted the peculiar fact that only where Bappis was concerned, did she ever show any stamina—though just now she had certainly held her own very gracefully with Catherine. He was glad indeed that with Bappis, at least, she was never sappy. Well, sappiness would never have gone down with Bappis!

“Do you know that she *punishes* Bappis?” Catherine demanded. “That he’s afraid to disobey her?”

“I’m glad he’s afraid to disobey some one besides me.”

“But you won’t permit your own sister to punish him!”

“My own sister,” he gravely answered, “doesn’t love Bappis as Joan does.”

She dropped her sewing into her lap and looked at him. “Well, upon my word!”

“What I came over here to ask you, Catherine, is this—why should you go so far out of your way to hurt one you could so well afford to be kind to?—you to whom life gives everything—beauty, wealth, influence—love! Why should you want to make the less fortunate lot of another any harder than it is?”

“Arthur, that girl makes me creep!”

“You could so well afford to treat her generously!”

"I never could conceal my true feelings. And I can't see why you are always coming to the defence of such a little——"

"Tut, tut!" he gently checked her, laying his hand on hers for an instant. "I always do sympathize with the under dog—being myself one. A radical among conservatives is the worst kind of a dog, you know!"

"You a dog! A lion rather!—king of beasts!"

She lifted such glowing eyes to his that he drew back frowning.

"Now stop that, or I'll——"

"Kiss me or not, as you please—I don't care what you do to me, so long as you'll let me be near you! Do you know—you don't believe it—but you are the very first man I ever threw myself at—wait!—at whom I ever threw myself—and——"

"And I shall not be the last!"

"You think I'm merely flirting with you?"

"Whatever you are merely doing, one thing is certain, I've got to get out of this!"

He rose abruptly, turned about and strode from the room, followed by a little gay, wild laugh from her that sent the hot blood to his face.

He cooled himself off by a promenade on the piazza, which happened at this hour to be empty.

Presently seating himself, he finished the inspection of his morning's mail. That done, he rose to go indoors again and, for safety, to his own room.

But in the wide hall, near the front door, he came unexpectedly upon Joan.

XV

SHE was on her knees on the floor undoing an express package. He had supposed her to be out with Bappis in the chicken-yard.

"Let me!" he said, going at once to her assistance; and kneeling beside her, he took out his pen-knife to snip the twine which bound a paste-board box. "Something for the trousseau? But no, there's not been time to send for anything yet, has there?—not even to let your mother know."

"It's something my mother is sending me. But of course she doesn't know yet of our—of the—marriage. She will get my letter this morning, telling her of it."

Lifting the box-lid and turning back some tissue paper, she displayed a most beautifully embroidered Japanese silk kimona.

She made no movement to take it out of its box and her face showed no pleasure at sight of the lovely thing—scarcely even any interest.

"It isn't what you wanted?" he asked.

"N—no."

"But it's a very beautiful robe, isn't it?" he said, lifting an elaborately decorated corner of it. "You love fine raiment, little girl, don't you?"

"I don't know that I do."

"But this—it's fit for a princess! Your mother is very, very indulgent!"

"Does it alarm you, Judge Randall," she faintly smiled, "my taste for 'fine raiment'?"

"You'll have a chance to indulge it now—without," he added, "taxing your mother, won't you? You can write to her that from this day forth she need never send you any more clothes—since you've some one else to take care of that now."

"I suppose," she said with constraint, coloring deeply and not meeting his eye, though she spoke steadily, "that in lieu of the salary you would have paid me as nursery governess, you will make me a fixed allowance?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you."

"You must not say 'Thank you' to me!—the obligation is going to be so overwhelmingly on my side, you know!"

"You will be giving me what I've never had in my life—a home."

"And you will be very glad for that?" he asked, turning a keen look upon her.

"Oh!" She breathed deep with satisfaction at the prospect.

Yet—he reflected—she had refused the salaried place which would have given her, he could not help feeling, a more self-respecting position than the anomalous one she was about to take.

"You have been used," he said, "to going about a great deal. You won't mind being tied down to one place?"

"Mind it!" she repeated with a little dreary laugh.
"No, I shall not mind it!"

"I trust you will not. By the way," he said abruptly, "there's one thing I've overlooked. Shall we sit down?" He gathered up the box and lid, and giving her his hand to rise, they seated themselves on the hall Davenport.

"It's about your mother."

He spoke gravely, as he sat beside her, his long legs crossed so that his left ankle rested on his right knee, one arm flung over the back of the couch behind her.

The impulse had suddenly come to him to test her about her mother. Not that anything concerning the girl really mattered to him so long as he knew she was good for Bappis—but he felt a curiosity on the point.

"You will think it strange—I hope you won't think it very unkind—but I shall prefer that your mother does not visit us."

The words sounded brutal to him and he felt himself color as he uttered them; but he wanted to see how she would meet such an abominable condition. If she should acquiesce to it?

"You mean," she asked, looking up at him with a childlike bewilderment in her pretty eyes, "just at first? You don't mean she shall *never* visit me?"

"I mean for several years."

She considered it, with eyes downcast upon the hands folded in her lap.

"You will spare me, then, occasionally to go to see her?" she inquired in a low voice, asking for no explanation of his strange *dictum*.

"I should not want you away from Bappis often—or for long at a time."

"I could take him with me."

"No," he said with gentle decision, "that I could not permit."

Again she weighed it in silence for a moment.

"How much time," he asked, a very unwonted feeling of embarrassment coming upon him, "are you accustomed to give to your mother?"

"About three times a year we spend a few weeks together."

"And the rest of the time you—visit your relatives and—and friends?"

The words seemed to come from him against his will; but though he regretted them when he saw how painfully she flushed under them, he felt an almost unconquerable inclination to discipline her shortcomings.

"But if I go much further," he thought, "she'll hate me—and throw me over!"

She did not answer his question or raise her downcast eyes.

"What a child she seems!" he reflected remorsefully as he looked down upon her heaving chest. "And what a *pretty* child too!"

"I shall be perfectly willing," he said, "to have you go to your mother for a few weeks three times a year."

Now if she assented to a condition so offensive and autocratic, he feared he could never again chide Catherine's contemptuous attitude towards the woman about to assume his name.

But she did not speak. She scarcely moved. As he looked at her, he was struck again with the sadness and pallor of her face—and he suddenly felt that it would give him satisfaction to kick himself out of the room! Life was certainly not very kind to this young girl!—its greatest unkindness being, no doubt, the infliction of innate weakness.

“Do you resemble your mother?” he curiously asked her. “I mean as to disposition, character.”

“Oh, no! *She* is a very dominating personality—while I!” she shrugged deprecatingly.

“Your mother a dominating personality?” he slowly repeated.

“Oh, yes!”

Randall contemplated this colossal lie for a moment, wondering what could be the reason for it.

“But I have met your mother,” he said, looking hard at her.

“Oh, have you? Why, *where*?”

“At the law office of young Eliot, who was collecting some money for her from that Annapolis valentine publisher, Wiggles.”

“Oh!”

“And,” he added, “I should hardly call her a dominating personality.”

“No, I am sure no one would dream of such a thing who met her merely in that way, as you did.”

No apologetic explanation was forthcoming of the damaging fact that her mother worked while she idled, though he waited to hear it. And she was accepting his

ipse dixit which practically forbade her mother his house!

"Judge Randall," she spoke timidly, "what explanation am I to give my mother for not inviting her to—my home?"

"Have you written her of the nature of our marriage?"

"N—no, Judge Randall."

"You are leaving her under the impression that it is a—a love marriage?"

"She will assume that—as I explained nothing in my letter to her."

"You don't wish her to know?"

"Not unless it becomes *necessary* to tell her."

"You fear she might withhold her consent?"

"She will feel happier believing I am marrying as—as other girls marry."

Privately, he believed that it was more likely pride than concern for her mother's happiness, which made her withhold the truth.

"As to a reason for not inviting her to visit you," he said hastily, "if you will trust it to me, I shall see to it that at least she is not hurt."

"You will never be troubled with my mother, Judge Randall."

Her tone was so neutral, he could not tell whether she spoke actually to reassure him, or in offended dignity for the slight to her mother. The latter did not seem probable, all things considered.

"It is not," he said, "that I am afraid of being 'troubled' with her. I have a very definite reason for

my request, which some day I may tell you—if you will bear with me.”

He rose as he spoke, picking up the box containing the kimona.

“Shall I leave this at your room?—I am going up.”

“If you will, thank you.”

“Yours is the back room next to Miss Tyson’s, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

He took a step away from her, then hesitated. “I meant to ask you,” he said, coming to her side again and absently laying the box on the Davenport, “you are not looking very well, very happy—is something wrong?—something troubling you? You know I told you to come to me freely.”

“It’s only,” she faltered, twisting nervously a ring on her finger, “that Cousin Sally makes me feel her disapproval.”

“Of course she’s not said anything to you?”

“No—only her manner——”

“Yes—yes. It’s abominably uncomfortable for you here, I see that!” he said sympathetically. “But it won’t be for long. Only ten days more—and then I shall take you and Bappis away. And,” he added with a smile that seemed suddenly to transform him as he looked down upon her, “you’ll see if I don’t make it up to you—what you’re going through in the interval! You can’t imagine,” he exclaimed, “how jubilant I feel at the prospect of getting into my own home again, with things

going right—as I’m sure you’ll make them—and having Bappis with me!”

Randall’s smile, usually mocking or bitter, could be very winning when, as now for an instant, his truer self came to the front—as it always did when he spoke of his boy.

Joan’s answering smile seemed trying to shake off her sadness to meet this more kindly mood of his.

“By the way,” she said, “I’ve been wondering——”

“Yes?” he encouraged her as she hesitated.

“I’ve been wondering how we are going to get round the marriage ceremony.”

“Ah, the marriage ceremony—yes. Let me see—‘love,’ ‘honor,’ ‘obey,’ ‘cherish,’ ‘cleave only unto her.’ Well—I once vowed all that—and here I am! The ceremony need not worry us.”

“No,” she placidly agreed, “I suppose it needn’t.”

“Oh!” said a voice at the other end of the hall, as Catherine, emerging from the library, came towards them, “*here* you are!” she addressed Judge Randall. “I’ve been looking for you. We’re going to motor to the Bluff, taking our luncheon with us. Will you come? You must—to shield me from Ned—*he’s* going!”

“Who else?”

“Cousin Sally, Mother, Bappis and the Johnsons, who’ve just stopped for us.”

“That’s protection enough for you without me. And——” He looked hesitatingly at Joan—“it would leave Miss Laird here alone all day.”

“Artie’s having some college boys out from town

to lunch with him. Cousin Sally's going to ask Miss Laird to see after them, I believe," Catherine coolly stated.

Before Randall could reply to this, Bappis suddenly appeared. "Obber!" he appealed to his father, "Aunt Sally says I must ride to the Bluff. But I'd rather stay home with Tante Joan. Mayn't I?"

"Nonsense, Bappis dear!" broke in Catherine. "You don't want to stay at home! Think of the lovely long ride."

"I hate those long rides! I won't go unless you go, Tante Joan."

"Let him stay with me—he will be happier," Joan quietly said to Randall, laying her arm about the boy's shoulders as he leaned at her side.

"Doesn't he *tire* you with this intense devotion?" Randall demurred.

"He and I will both be happier here," she replied smiling.

He turned to Catherine. "You and Sally'd better excuse me too."

For answer, she took him by the sleeve and pulled him with her. "You're *coming*! To have Ned on my hands all day—well, I won't accept life on those conditions!"

At her touch he yielded as a needle follows a magnet.

"I wonder," Catherine asked him, when, later, she and Randall were seated together in the motor, on their way to the Bluff, "whether Joan Laird bribes or frightens Bappis into acting those touching little parts?"

"Ask her. It would be like you," he retorted with his ironic laugh.

For a time during that ride, the picture he had left—the young girl with her arm about the boy who leaned against her—remained before him. The sweetness of it haunted him—until the more potent charm close by his side all the long day dispelled the fainter allurements.

When, at the end of the afternoon, the party returned to Beechlands, Mrs. McCord felt happily hopeful that the menace to her beloved brother's career was safely averted.

XVI

THREE days later, when the time stipulated for secrecy as to his betrothal was drawing to an end, Randall received in his morning's mail a letter calculated either to precipitate the impending catastrophe (as his sister regarded it) of his marriage with Joan, or else to break it off altogether. The letter was from his divorced wife.

He had written her fully and frankly of what he was about to do, explaining his reasons and all the circumstances; withholding only one thing—the name of the prospective step-mother. He offered his former wife her last chance to return to him and to her son. He would break his engagement, he said, at once upon receiving her promise to come back to them.

He had known that she would refuse; so his letter to her had been a mere formality to clear his conscience of any wrong to her in this second marriage. He had known also that the thought of a step-mother over Bappis would almost madden her—and though he profoundly pitied her, he felt that since she had it in her own hands to avert this thing, her suffering was self-inflicted.

Her reply was—like all her letters—like herself in short—cold, proud, unimpassioned. Yes, even her deep mother-love was unimpassioned. He should not, she affirmed, put a step-mother over their son. If he would give Bappis to her, his own mother, she gave her word she would never lift a finger to interfere with his marry-

ing again. But she gave him fair warning that to this last outrage of a step-mother she would not submit. In spite of his secrecy, she would learn who the woman was, and would reveal to her the truth about his divorce; she would forbid the bans; she would save her boy from this wrong, even though, in order to do so, she be forced to the course which in the beginning she ought to have taken—the dragging of their disgraceful story into the courts.

And he knew she meant it. These were no idle threats. Laura never talked idly.

Why not avert her probable interference by taking Joan at once to the little church up the lane and having it over? His home at Eastport was ready now and equipped with servants and there was no special reason for delaying the ceremony another week.

He would speak with Joan.

It was ten o'clock in the morning and he was at his desk in his own room. Hastily locking up Laura's letter, he rose to go at once, without loss of time, to find his *fiancée*. But, half-way across his room, he was arrested by a knock on his door, and opening it, there stood Joan before him.

It was the first time she had ever voluntarily come to him and it gave him a peculiar start of surprise. He saw at once that she was in trouble, so white and strained she looked.

"May I speak with you?" she asked timidly.

"I was just coming to find you. Come in," he said in a kindly reassuring tone.

He placed a chair for her and they sat down.

"You told me to come to, you freely—if I needed advice."

"Of course. Don't hesitate to tell me anything. How can I help you?"

"Judge Randall, I can't stand it any longer!"

"'Can't stand it'? You don't mean, child," he sharply demanded, "that you are going to back out?"

The sudden sinking of his heart revealed to him how dear had grown the thought of living once more in his own home, well-ordered, now, and comfortable, with this quiet, unobtrusive, capable young person at the head of it—and his boy, happy and well-cared for, always there.

"What's the matter?" he asked in keen anxiety. "I've gone right ahead, as you know, with all the arrangements! It's rather late now—don't you think?—to change your mind! Ah!" he exclaimed, as here an idea came to him which brought him a flash of hope, "is it what I said about your mother's visiting you? I certainly don't think the worse of you for not standing *that*! Of course I did not mean it—I was merely testing you."

"'Testing' me?"

"To find out whether you cared more for Bappis and a home of your own than for your mother."

"Oh!"

The quaint way she had of looking at him with big eyes and popping "Oh!" at him, invariably piqued his curiosity to know the thought behind that non-committal comment.

"Did you find out?" she asked with an apparently impersonal interest.

"I am finding out now—if you are here to say you 'can't stand' such tyranny."

"No, it isn't *that* I came to say."

"Ah?" he said dryly. "It isn't that."

"I don't want to 'back out.' Oh, I'll *marry* you, Judge Randall," she hastily reassured him. "I came to say I can't stand it *here* any longer!"

"You *will* marry me?" he exclaimed almost with a jump of relief. "You gave me a shock, you know! I think I really heard my countenance fall with a thud!"

At his exclaiming so audibly, she glanced apprehensively towards the door. "If our secret engage—compact—isn't to be announced to the household?" she suggested.

"Exactly. I'll take care—thank you. Now then, what's the trouble here that you can't stand? Miss Tyson or Sally?"

"Your sister," she said, her pale face flushing; "she does not speak to me—she hasn't spoken to me since you told her—and if I speak to her she does not answer me—I can't bear it! I must leave. I am going to-day!"

"By the gods!" he exclaimed in low, angry voice as the realization came to him of how his sister had, in the past week, made this little creature suffer. "Sally *can* put on the thumb-screws when she sets her mind to it, I know!"

That she had gone farther than he had dreamed she

would was manifest from this turning of the worm—this unprecedented decision of Joan's to bear no more.

"I've done wrong to subject you to such an ordeal, you poor child! You are going away to-day?"

"I must. I can't stand it any longer."

"Where did you intend to go?"

"I—I don't know. I wondered whether I couldn't go right on to your home at Eastport and—and get my hand in—until you are ready to come on for the—the marriage ceremony."

"You are still disinclined to spend the time with your mother?"

"I would rather not."

"Very well, then. Listen to me. I was just about to go out to find you when you came to my door. I was going to ask you if you could be ready—and willing—to go with me *to-day* to the little church down the lane—for the ceremony—and take the five o'clock train for Eastport—you and I and Bappis. If you can—and will—I'll wire home at once to Chloe to be ready for us with dinner and to have our rooms in order."

Joan's face had gone pale again as he spoke and never had she looked at him with bigger, rounder eyes, though this time the usual "Oh!" was not forthcoming—she looked too breathless to utter it.

"What time shall we go to the church?" she asked.

"You will do it?"

"Yes."

"At four o'clock then. I'll see the clergyman this morning. As no one must know of this until the last

minute, will you pack Bappis' things?—if you will be so good?"

"Certainly. But—don't you think we ought to tell Cousin Sally? It would be treating her hospitality to me so ungratefully if I ran off secretly——"

"Leave that to me, little girl. I'll take care of Sally. We'll bid her good-by of course. Now—I want to tell you *why* I am precipitating this thing."

He frowned and his mouth grew sad and bitter as he offered his explanation—speaking tersely and rapidly to get through with it.

"Bappis' mother threatens to put a stop to this marriage—though she has steadily refused my repeated, urgent requests that she return to me. She has of course no legal means of hindering it—she doesn't realize that and she is preparing to do all she can. Therefore we must stop her by marrying at once—before she can raise a storm of any kind."

"Why does she want to prevent it, if she doesn't want to return to you herself?" Joan wonderingly asked.

"She doesn't want her boy to have a step-mother," he replied, looking at her keenly as he spoke. She answered his look with a round-eyed gaze which seemed suddenly to see strange new areas of life spread open to her. She did not speak.

"It will be your task, Joan——" it was the first time he had called her that and he noted the flicker of her eyes as it oddly fell upon his own ears as well as hers—"to guard your charge from being stolen away by

his mother—as you would guard his life! As you would guard your own life!—for with Bappis gone, the only justification, the sole reason, for this strange marriage of ours would cease to exist. You understand?”

“Yes, Judge Randall.”

“And you unhesitatingly undertake this responsibility? I do want you to go into it with your eyes open; with no possibility of your feeling, after a time, that you had been beguiled into a mistake. You are very young—I don’t want to take advantage of your youth and inexperience and innocence.”

“I understand just what I am doing, Judge Randall—and I do it willingly.”

The sad, bitter lines about his mouth relaxed, he drew a long breath of relief, and his face softened with the winning smile which so transformed him.

“As we are going to be married,” he said, “you’ll have to get over calling me ‘Judge Randall,’ you know! You’ll really have to take the plunge and call me ‘Arthur’!”

“Oh, but I couldn’t!”

“Oh, but you must! If you call me ‘Judge Randall’ after we are married,” he threatened, “I shall publicly address you as Miss Laird!”

She smiled, as she replied, “You have a way of always gaining your point, haven’t you?”

“Merely a lawyer’s bad habit—don’t let it alarm you. I shall **never** interfere with your freedom. I shan’t have any desire to do so,” he added in a tone of reserve that sounded like a polite snub, whereas he was really resist-

ing a temptation to soften to a brotherly or fatherly tenderness to the girl now that she was about to trust herself to his keeping. Such temptation must of course be resisted. The essential thing was to keep this relation a business one purely.

There was a sudden knock on the door—it was opened, and Sally stood in the room.

XVII

"WHAT are you doing in *Judge Randall's room?*" Mrs. McCord, breathless with mingled anger and apprehension, demanded of the pale girl who, at her entrance, rose and stood facing her.

"I came to tell Judge Randall I was going away to-day, Cousin Sally," she answered so quietly, in a manner so misleading as to what she was really about to do, that for the first time a doubt assailed Randall. Was she a consummate actress?—subtle, deep and full of guile? But what did it matter—so long as nothing could shake his confidence in the genuineness of her affection for Bappis?

"Oh, you *are* going away to-day?" Mrs. McCord exclaimed.

"Yes."

"You need not have come here to Judge Randall's room to tell him—I gave you credit for at least *some* sense of propriety!" she spoke excitedly, as though scarcely knowing what she was saying; Randall had never before seen his dignified, self-poised sister come so near to losing her self-control. "I can't permit such things in my house, Joan! I shall write to your mother of your conduct!"

"Sally! Come, come!" Randall checked her. "My dear, don't let your tongue run away with you! Take it out of *me*, not out of this child! If there's been any 'impropriety,' I'm the responsible culprit! But I assure

you, sister," he said mockingly, "there's nothing tragic in the situation!—not a thing to call for melodramatics!"

He turned to the girl at his side, touching her elbow with the tips of his fingers. "Go now, Joan, and pack your trunk. Leave this whole business to me."

Obediently and without a word, Joan glided from the room. Randall closed the door after her and leaning against it with folded arms, regarded his sister.

"Now then, Sally, my dear, the time has come when you'll have to be polite to Joan, or apologize to *me*—I'm going to marry her."

"Arthur! *Why* will you do this unspeakably foolish thing? Putting a mill-stone about your neck! I will prevent it! For your own happiness I will prevent it! You don't *love* the girl!"

"No, I don't love the girl."

"And you do love Catherine!"

"God forbid! It was to save myself from the Medicean lure of Catherine that I asked Joan to marry me! You did it all, Sally, when you put Catherine in my way. No man of blood could withstand that woman, by God, if she roused herself from her indolence to care for *him*! But 'the best laid plans,' you know! Yours has sadly miscarried, hasn't it?"

"What a *strange* man you are, Arthur! Oh! I *will* save you from this folly! Arthur! I will notify Laura! I declare I will!"

"What could poor Laura do, Sally?"

"I will tell Joan the truth about your divorce!"

Their eyes met on this—steel meeting flint. Was she beside herself to say such a thing as that to him?

“If I thought that that knowledge would stop her marrying me, Sally, it would not be withheld from her. If you know me, you know that. If my marriage with her were going to be a *real* marriage, I would myself tell her.”

“Oh, Arthur, forgive me for saying that to you!” she almost sobbed. “Forgive me! But think!” she rallied her forces. “Think how *bored* you will be all the rest of your life—with a wife who has no more spirit than to remain perfectly passive while the man she’s engaged to pays the most devoted attentions to another and more attractive woman!”

“As there has never been any pretence of sentiment between us, she would have shown very bad taste to resent my ‘devoted attentions to another woman.’ Joan’s manner of meeting the situation has seemed to me admirable, even quite wonderful! She’s been just right—reserved, sensible, really dignified, come to think of it. I’ve been astonished at her handling of her case. I declare she’s shown her blood and breeding! Had she ever once, the past week, made the least claim upon me on the score of our betrothal or shown anything approaching a regard for me, I should have broken our compact instantly.”

“Well!” exclaimed Sally in deep disgust, “I certainly wish you both joy of your ‘compact’!”

“I don’t look for ‘joy.’ I do look for solid comfort.”

“Even that you will miss! You’ll find Joan won’t

submit—once she *has* you—to the crusts you’ve flung her during this betrothal! She’ll demand her rights.”

“I’m not worried. She understands what I expect. She’ll live up to it—or I’ll fling her off like an old glove.”

“Your conception of the sacredness and permanence of marriage, Arthur!”

“As I’ve told you, dear,” he patiently repeated, “this is not a marriage except in appearance—it’s a union of convenience solely. There’s nothing sacred about it.”

“If you believe in the sacredness of the institution of marriage, how can you desecrate it by using it for your own convenience?”

“What is it only, Sally, that makes marriage anything more than a mere civil contract?—that makes it sacramental? The begetting of children. That alone. And, understand me, there are to be no children in this case.”

“Other men have said that.”

“I’ve learned too overwhelmingly the responsibility of bringing children into the world! And a child conceived except in love has a poor heritage. If Joan and I make a happy home for Bappis we shall not desecrate the institution of marriage half so much as it’s desecrated in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred.”

She drew a long, deep breath as she hopelessly, mournfully gazed at him.

“I think you’re crazy, you know! When are you going to *do* it?”

“Just as soon as I can arrange.”

“You’ve not fixed the time?”

"Well," he said with caution, "I've not yet engaged the parson."

"Oh, Arthur!" she said, her lips quivering, "you think it is only my ambition for you that makes me so opposed to this thing. But it isn't only that. If you loved her, I'd take her to my heart—glad for your happiness—deeply disappointed though I'd be at your choosing *her*! But to saddle yourself with such an insignificant creature when you don't care anything about her—all for the sake of your boy—it is so idiotic that I feel I *must* stop you—I——"

Randall suddenly stepped to her side and took her into his arms.

"Do you think I don't *know*, dear," he said tenderly, "how much you do care for my happiness? So much more than I deserve! Don't suppose I don't *mind* doing what you so dislike—you who have always stood by me through everything! But, dear, a man must lead his own life, work out his own—damnation, if you will. You can't live my life for me, nor yet tell me how to live it. So, when I blunder, you must not take it so to heart—seeing you're not responsible."

"How can I help taking it to heart if I care for you?"

For answer, he gently kissed her forehead, as he dropped his arms.

She sighed profoundly as she gave it up and left him.

He took his hat and went out to call on the neighborhood clergyman.

XVIII

THE atmosphere of the household at dinner that night was electric. The variety of emotions, from amazement, excitement, consternation and rage, to hot and bitter resentment, with which the different members of the family and the guests greeted the astounding discovery that at four o'clock that afternoon Judge Randall had been married to Joan Laird in the little church in the lane, made the air vibrant, the food tasteless.

It was the three males of the family who were foremost and loudest in the expression of their sentiments—marvelling that never a sign had they seen of what had been impending. How in the world had the courting been managed so secretly? Evidently those two sly ones had realized that Mrs. McCord would try hard to head them off if she discovered what was on foot! It had of course been Joan's sentimentalizing over Bappis that had landed her big fish! Who would have thought the quiet little schemer had it *in* her to be up to such a fine game as this! To see and work her chance so cleverly! Well, she *had* made a good nest for herself!

"*I* thought he was gone on *you*, Catherine?" declared Artie. "He certainly didn't show it any that he was taken with Joan!"

Save for two bright spots high on her cheeks, Catherine's customary languid indifference seemed quite unruffled as, sitting beside Ned, she sipped her soup,

making no comments whatever on the stupendous news which had descended upon them like a thunder-clap.

Her mother, at Mr. McCord's right, seemed far more agitated and distressed. "So *this* is why she cancelled her engagement to visit me! My gracious! I never suspected it! If I had dreamed it was *this*—well, one never knows people! To think that all this while that seemingly innocent, babyish young girl has been holding down that great big man—and under our very eyes—and we all supposed—well, to be sure, Catherine dear, he always took her part when you showed your distrust of her—that I *did* notice—and, my love, you might have taken the hint and not have snubbed her so when he was by and maybe *you*—O well, it may be all for the best—to be sure he already *had* a wife for that matter—if you'll excuse my saying so, dear Sally! And I suppose one ought really *not* to be so loose in one's views about divorced people's marrying again—though one certainly couldn't blame any man for falling out with such a cold, distant creature as Laura always——"

"Oh, *hush*, Mother, for heaven's sake!" Catherine checked her at last—to the little woman's pained embarrassment.

"I almost pity Laura—when she hears of it!" Mrs. McCord, looking white to the lips, spoke for the first time.

"She has only herself to blame," her husband retorted, regarding his wife's pale face anxiously. "Why couldn't she have overlooked things and have gone back to him—and to her son? I've no patience with that woman!

But come!—let us have some details, Sally! When did you first learn of this thing, to-day?”

“Arthur came to my room at half past three when nearly every one in the house was asleep,” she related in a lifeless tone, the reaction from her hard week of futile strain and effort having left her limp; “to say he was about to take Joan to the church!—and did I care to come? Their trunks—Joan’s and Bappis’—were then being taken out of the house! They were all three going at once to his house at Eastport. I saw that he preferred I *shouldn’t* come to the church. He looked as white and resolute as though he were going to his execution instead of to his marriage! So I told him there wouldn’t be time for me to dress—and he said good-bye to me—and left good-bye for the rest of you—and went.”

“You didn’t see Joan?”

“I couldn’t bring myself to!—and Arthur didn’t press it. I shall have to get over it, of course,” she added with a long breath, “and make the best of it. But Arthur must give me time!”

“I say,” exclaimed McCord, “it was outrageous of Arthur to spring this thing on you without warning! I’ll tell him what I think of him!”

“He gave me warning—a week ago.”

“What? You knew a week ago that this was going on—and kept it from me?”

Catherine, at this point, raised her eyes to Sally’s face.

“I was afraid, Hubert, to trust to your discretion to keep silent about it. I’ve worked harder this past week to break up their little ‘compact,’ as they called it, than

ever I worked over anything in my life! Oh!" she cried, "for a man like Arthur to marry so unambitiously, to throw himself away on a nonentity like Joan, is bad enough!—but to have him marry a girl he admits he doesn't care for—just for the sake of Bappis!"

"Doesn't care for her!" repeated Hubert sceptically. "Rot! Erratic as he is, he couldn't be quite such an ass as to go and marry her if he doesn't care for her, doesn't find her attractive! Not for a dozen Bappises!"

"Oh, but when you think," cried Ned, who was secretly delighted at the unexpected turn of events which had providentially removed from the field his formidable rival, "how Uncle Arthur has always doted on that boy!"

"And how," added Artie, "the dear departed Joan did work her Bappis game!"

"Did he tell you, Cousin Sally," Catherine lazily asked, "that he did not care for her?"

"Yes—and that he was marrying her because it was the only way he could get her for Bappis; seeing she had refused his offer of a salaried position as Bappis' governess."

"Didn't she know how to play her cards!" cried Artie. "You can't call *her* a 'nonentity,' Mother! Just let these quiet people alone for getting there!"

"Laura will do *everything* to get Bappis from them," affirmed Sally. "And if she succeeds, Arthur, having no more use for Joan, will simply have her on his hands as an incumbrance! What will he, then, *do* with her? That's the question! Or if the boy should die?"

"Oh, come, my dear!" exclaimed Hubert insistently,

"Arthur didn't marry Joan *only* for the sake of that boy of his! Don't you believe it! To be sure, his concern for the boy may have led him on. Joan was cute enough to find his weak spot."

Before such incredulity as this, Sally knew she would never have courage to repeat to her husband what Arthur had confided to her of his "compact" with Joan. "This is not a marriage except in appearance," her brother had assured her. "There is nothing sacred about it."

She could hear Hubert's guffaw at such a piece of information; he would declare that whatever the mutual understanding with which Arthur and Joan had joined hands over Bappis, their resolution would not stand long before the intimacy of daily life under the same roof; not when a man of a temperament like Arthur's, held in his possession a fresh, sweet young girl like Joan!

No, Sally knew she could never speak to her robust, lusty husband of this phase of her brother's most lamentable marriage. Hubert was too hopelessly incapable of understanding a man like Arthur. Oh, to be sure, Arthur, too, was robust; and with "temperament" enough, heaven knows! But of a fineness before which "dear Hubert" often seemed to her like a being of another species.

Late that night, Catherine Tyson, alone in her room, pacing the floor with long, noiseless, restless step, her indifference and languor gone, her head erect and her eyes flashing with the pain, rage and resentment that possessed her, resolved within herself that this contemptuous slight she had received at the hands of Arthur Randall should not go unpunished.

"The only man I ever cared for in my life! The only man I ever lifted a finger to win! The only man who ever *dared* to kiss me! Oh!" She hid her burning face behind her hands in stinging humiliation at the thought of how she had *invited* those kisses! "I was so sure he was like all the rest—mad about me! He *knew* I never would have given way to my feelings as I did if I had not supposed he cared too! Oh, he did care, he does! Crazy as it seems, I believe he *did* marry that girl only to get her for Bappis' nurse! And she was just toad enough to accept an offer of marriage like that—as the best she could ever hope to do any way! *But,*" she passionately told herself, "he had no right to marry her when he had gone so far with me! No right, no right! And I'll make him regret it! Oh, my day is not over! I'll go to Eastport for the winter! He can't resist me—I'll have him, marriage or no marriage!"

The consoling conviction that it was in her power to win him even yet, soothed her sufficiently to cool somewhat the fever of her heart.

She went to bed, but long she lay awake following in imagination the course of things to-night between that strangely married pair. A maddening curiosity, no less than a sickening envy and jealousy filled her mind.

Presently she fell to wondering how Joan, silent and shy as she was, could ever fill her place, socially, as mistress of Judge Randall's home? Would she even attempt it?—or would she simply settle back as Bappis' nurse? Would not Judge Randall *wish* his wife to figure in Eastport society? True—Sally had told her—he had always

steered very clear of a social round himself, even when a youth; but still, he would hardly expect or wish his wife to make a recluse of herself. Anyway, as a public man, one of the foremost in the State, he was obliged to do considerable entertaining. Would Joan be equal to it? She saw herself in Joan's place at the head of Randall's home—and felt what a *stupid* mistake he had made!

At the same time she recalled one or two occasions when Sally had had Joan preside for her at afternoon tea, and once at a formal luncheon; and how she, Catherine, had been secretly surprised at the way the girl had risen to the occasion. Perhaps, given her chance, she would astonish them all! She *had* astonished them, goodness knows!

The newspapers would announce the marriage—would Eastport society call on the bride? Of course all the friends of the Randalls would call, except the old-fashioned ones with prejudices against divorced people's remarrying.

"Well! He has run away from me and got himself married—but if I find I can't sail right in and make them both dance to my piping, I'll take *means*! I'll kidnap Bappis and give him to Laura! And then, as Sally says, all reason for Joan's being in Arthur Randall's house will cease to exist—and again I'll have my chance!"

What sort of chance? she asked herself. His third wife? Of course, no—he would have to have some regard for his political career. She did not need to *marry* him—his love was all she wanted!

"His love, his love—I can't live without it! I will have it! I *won't* live without it!"

PART II

I

SOME recent decisions handed down by the Supreme Court of the State had revealed Judge Randall to be so radically opposed to private monopoly of power as to make him, for the hour, the favorite theme of the newspapers all over the country. His face, familiar to every child from its frequent appearance in the papers, was of course recognized at once upon his arrival at any public place. Therefore, as he boarded a train one afternoon in October to return to his Eastport home after three weeks' absence, he chose a seat near the door where he would not be apt to be observed and accosted; for he preferred to spend the two and a half hours of the journey in reading and reflection, to giving the time to fellow-travellers.

Lounging comfortably in his seat with his newspaper held well before his face, he felt fairly safe from interruption, in spite of the fact that he was in a crowded day-coach, there being no parlor-cars on the train.

He was uncommonly glad to be getting home, after three weeks of hotel and restaurant life combined with hard professional work.

It was just five weeks ago to-day that his marriage to Joan had taken place—the first two of which he had spent in Eastport; the latter three in New York. Those first two weeks at home had more than reassured him as to

the success of his venture, and this afternoon, as occasionally his eyes strayed from his paper to the October landscape, he thought with complacency and with a new-born sense of well-being, how good it was to have a home to go to. He was sure no man ever appreciated the blessing of a comfortable and beautifully kept home until he had had a few years of knocking about in hotels or of living in a household so miserably and wastefully managed as almost to drive him to crime. By contrast with what he had been through in the past few years, his present situation, plus the unspeakable satisfaction of his boy's happiness, seemed to him Paradise. Joan was certainly conscientious in the discharge of her duties. Not only that, she had a knack of making the house seem homelike and cosey beyond anything he had ever known or imagined. And best of all, she did it without taxing him with herself any more than a house-cat would have done. That was the ideal phase of it—that he was as free and undisturbed as a bachelor. Another satisfactory aspect was that the house-cat herself seemed fairly purring with contentment; as perfectly satisfied, apparently, to be let alone as he was. Sally's prediction that once she "had him," she would "exact her rights," showed no sign, as yet, of being fulfilled.

True, he had always disliked house-cats, even as he had always found very domestic women inexpressibly tiresome; but as Joan, with a proper sensitiveness, avoided obtruding herself upon him, he was getting from their bargain nothing but solid comfort; and he was confident that this was equally the case with her.

That things could continue like this—so satisfactorily comfortable all round—well, why shouldn't they? He would always see to it that Joan had everything in the world that he could give her and that——

“Oh! *You* here! Dear me!”

He started as though shot, and turning from the window, his paper dropping to his knee, he saw before him, in the aisle of the car, Catherine Tyson, tastefully and elegantly gowned as always, in a brown cloth suit with a brown velvet *toque* on her head—details of a woman's garb had always baffled him, though he did have an eye for effects—and the general effect of Catherine at this moment was certainly “stunning.”

Instantly on his feet, drawing off his glove, he shook hands with her, his face lit up with pleasure at sight of her.

“My first opportunity to congratulate you!” she said, with her fascinating air of lazy boredom.

“Thank you. Where is your seat? May I come and sit with you?”

“I'll sit here with you for a while, if I may. My maid is up in front with my bag and umbrella. I didn't know, when I planned to take this train, that it had only day-coaches. So uncomfortable—so crowded and stuffy, isn't it?”

“Your mother is not with you then?” he asked, stepping out to give her the seat by the window, then seating himself beside her. “Where are you going, if I may know?”

“To Eastport. Mother follows on the night train.”

"To Eastport? But you know Sally's not there, don't you?—and that her house is closed? She's still at Beechlands and she's off next week for Florence for the winter."

He looked at her rather quizzically as he said this. Did she know that Sally was going abroad to elude the necessity of being civil to Joan and presenting her to Eastport society?

"But to say good-by to Cousin Sally is what we're coming to Eastport for—Mother and I," Catherine replied.

"But Sally's not coming to Eastport before she sails—she goes right from Beechlands to her ship."

"It's easy enough to motor out to Beechlands. Mother and I have promised Sally to spend part of the winter in Eastport to look after Ned and Cousin Hubert a bit."

"Ah! Indeed! I had not been told of that. You are going to stay at Sally's house this winter, then?"

"She wants us to—but I would not let Mother consent to that—it would give me quite too much of Ned! We shall put up at the LaFayette to-night, and to-morrow engage a suite there for the winter."

"You'll look after Ned and Hubert from the LaFayette?"

"We shall run in every few days to keep them from missing Sally too much and to see that the servants are taking good care of them."

"Ah! I see."

It was with mingled emotions that Randall heard this news. Undoubtedly Catherine was a pleasant—even a delightful—stimulus to him; but she was also something of a torment; a disturber of his peace. To be sure,

too much peace was rather stultifying! However, if she and Joan were brought together *now*, Catherine would certainly have to change her attitude.

"But you can't go to the LaFayette alone to-night—without your mother," he suddenly bethought him.

"I have my maid. Mother was to have joined me at Annapolis, but wired that she could not leave until to-night."

"Then you'll have to come home with me," he said with spontaneous Southern hospitality and chivalry, "and let us take care of you until your mother comes."

"I don't know," she replied uncertainly, "about that, thank you. Your Joan might not be pleased to see me!"

"Of course you'll have to behave your nicest to her."

"Even then? I'm afraid my 'nicest' would not condone for your offence in bringing *me* back with you from your journey!" she laughed. "Have you been away long?"

"Three weeks."

"That long! Then you had only a two weeks' honeymoon!"

"Long enough to prove to myself that I'm a lucky man!"

"How could you so soon run away from your bliss and stay so long?"

"Business. Not inclination."

"And you are really so daring"—she turned to him squarely—"as to take me home with you?"

"Why not?"

"Well," she drew a long breath, as she relaxed and

leaned back luxuriously in her seat, "to be sure, if Joan could stand that last week at Beechlands and not throw you over, she'd stand anything!"

Coolly, indifferently as she spoke, the challenge of her words was like the flick of a whip. But, with a sense of rather enjoying the game, he answered her with equal coolness; "Don't let that last week at Beechlands worry you—Joan and I understand each other perfectly. And as for my bringing you home with me to-night, our understanding is still too clear for it to cause her uneasiness."

"And our last week at Beechlands—it doesn't 'worry' *you?*" she wondered impersonally.

"Why should it?"

"What a *delightfully* comfortable conscience some men have!"

"The woman tempted me and I did eat."

"Don't you think you're a bit of a *cad*, Arthur Randall?"

"To Joan?"

"Oh, Joan!" she shrugged. "She's not human, evidently!"

"More divine than human, I find her!" he admitted.

"Don't fancy you can deceive me into believing you are in love with her!"

"When does your mother reach Eastport?"

"Eleven-forty-five."

"Come home to dinner with me—then later we'll take the motor and meet your mother's train and I'll take you both to your hotel."

"If you insist, thank you. How is Bappis?"

"Been having German measles in my absence. Joan wrote she'd had a siege of it, keeping him entertained when he was convalescing!"

"A cheerful honeymoon for her!"

"I wired her to get a trained nurse. But she preferred to nurse him herself. It was the easiest way out for her!—Bappis would have raised hell if any one had tried to come between him and his Tante Joan! I've got a bauble in my trunk to compensate her for what she's been through—she's fond of finery; I'll let Bappis present it to her."

Catherine looked at him curiously. How awfully absorbed he was in that troublesome little boy of his—and how *well* Joan played up to it!

"But," she said to herself, "she pays too dear for what she gets! No man living would be worth the price of taking care of another woman's spoiled child for him!"

"So I suppose," she remarked aloud, "it was *Bappis* Joan promised to love, cherish and obey in sickness and in health!"

Randall laughed. "Look!" He suddenly drew her attention to the view. "We're coming to the Bay—we shall have the sunset on it! Ah, how I love this beautiful water!"

They dropped intimate personalities, then, and talked of other matters. Catherine did not go back to her own seat until they neared Eastport.

The two and a half hours' ride seemed amazingly short to them both; and Catherine, the deep, passionate pur-

pose of her mind strengthened tenfold by the wild ecstasy that shook her in this unexpected encounter with Randall, looked upon their meeting as "Providential," her carelessly illogical theology not bothering to draw fine distinctions between what is evangelically known as "divine Providence," and what is more commonly recognized to be diabolical rather than divine.

II

SEATED at his dinner table that evening, Randall, endeavoring to collect himself and get his bearings after the succession of sharp surprises which had greeted his home-coming, was too preoccupied to join much in the lively talk of his guests. For it turned out that Catherine was not their only dinner guest.

Upon his arrival with Miss Tyson an hour before, Joan greeting him in the hall, he had found himself rather annoyed to have Catherine witness the fact that after a three weeks' absence, he met his wife with only a formal hand-clasp.

Bappis, having been allowed to stay up to see "Obber," had run before his step-mother and had frantically clung about his father's neck, his real joy at seeing him actually postponing for a few moments his demand for "a present," though he knew that in view of his illness during his father's absence, the present would certainly be an unusually fine one.

Whatever of astonishment Joan may have felt at sight of Randall's adjuncts—Miss Tyson and her maid—she held herself in hand with wonderful coolness, receiving them, upon Randall's hasty explanation of Miss Tyson's plight, with the formal politeness a courteous boarding-house mistress might use in greeting a new boarder.

Miss Tyson's manner, also formally polite, very thinly though subtly veiled the contempt she felt for Mrs.

Randall's ridiculous position in this house. The bride's air of boarding-house-mistress exactly met Catherine's idea of her place here; and her own cool, careless attitude towards her hostess just escaped being insolent.

Summoning a maid, Joan bade her take Miss Tyson to one of the guest rooms.

"You will excuse my going up with you, please? I have a visitor in the drawing-room."

"You will have to let us dine without changing, Joan," said Randall, "as Miss Tyson's luggage is at the LaFayette and I'm too dead tired."

When fifteen minutes later, having made himself a bit fresh, Randall joined Joan again in the drawing-room, to await with her Miss Tyson's coming down, he discovered that the "visitor" to whom she had referred was still with her—the young physician who had attended Bappis in his illness; making, evidently, a social, not a professional, visit, as he was in evening dress—and Bappis was now entirely recovered.

This was the first of the succession of surprises—a man of the world like Dr. Brooks finding Joan interesting enough to take him out of his way for a visit with her.

Upon Randall's appearing, Brooks rose at once to take his leave, but when the Judge added his invitation to Joan's that he stop to dine with them, the doctor promptly accepted. He was very much at home in this house, his father, into whose practice he had succeeded, having been the Randall family physician for forty years.

Catherine came in almost immediately and Joan led

the way to dinner. And it was at this point that Randall had become conscious of a rather startling transformation in his wife—his second surprise.

She wore a gray crêpe dinner gown in which he had seen her often at Beechlands and which was just a trifle shabby; so it was not her garb that transformed her. He had been vaguely aware of something unaccustomed in her remarkably self-possessed reception of Catherine and again in her bearing towards Dr. Brooks. But as she walked before him with Brooks to the dining-room he seemed scarcely to recognize the apologetic, shrinking little creature he had known, in this graceful girl with straight shoulders, head erect, and bright, eager, happy face upturned to her companion.

Catherine, too, he saw, was staring at her with astonished eyes.

And now, seated opposite her at the table, he found himself dumb before her unbelievable vivacity. Joan vivacious! What did it mean? Had her sudden transplanting from abject dependence to a position of comparative dignity and apparent independence caused her to bloom out like this? Or—he looked at young Brooks. The doctor was an attractive fellow, with his father's skill and cleverness, it was universally conceded, in his profession. A black-haired, black-eyed, interesting-looking man, with pale, clean-shaven face; a mouth both sensitive and sensuous combined with a firm, strong chin; and beneath the intelligent brow the dark eyes flashed a fire that confirmed both the sensitiveness and the sensuousness of the mouth. A warm imagination held under the control

of a keen scientific sense made this man a force, not only in his profession but as a personality. The Southern deliberateness of his manner seemed in odd contrast to the vivid and abundant vitality which his face and physique suggested.

Joan and this man had been together at Bappis' bedside where Joan would of course show at her best, her sweetest, her womanliest. And she *was* rather a pretty girl. Was it, then, perhaps a bit of masculine admiration that had thus brought her out?

Randall was seeing something to-night he had never seen before in his acquaintance with Catherine Tyson—a man meeting her for the first time and not losing himself in admiration of her. Brooks did not seem to realize that Catherine in a mere travelling suit far outshone Joan in full evening attire. In fact, Joan seemed to absorb his attention quite to the exclusion of Catherine.

Randall wondered a little at the fact that evidently Joan had not, as yet, taken advantage of the ample means now at her command to buy herself some new frocks. The thing she had on was not very fit.

It was during the salad course that Catherine for the first time turned her conversation from Randall to her hostess (it seemed, by the way, passing strange that Joan Laird should be Catherine Tyson's hostess!), "What on earth," she inquired with a faintly ironic smile, "has so changed Bappis, Mrs. Randall, if I may ask? Never in all my quite extensive acquaintance with the young man have I seen him go off to bed so meekly with his nurse! His step-mother has him under better discipline than his

‘Tante’ had, hasn’t she? I must tell his Aunt Sally—she will be so glad!”

“Oh,” replied Joan blithely, “I *bribed* him to go ‘meekly’ to bed without me!”

“Indeed?”

“‘Bribed him,’ Joan?” Randall questioned. “Oh, I wouldn’t do that, you know. That’s rather bad!”

“The bribe was that he could stay up to see you—on condition that he would then go up to bed without me. When he goes to bed at his usual time, I stay with him until he falls asleep.”

“I see. *That* was all right—that kind of bribing.”

“His Aunt Sally always wished,” said Catherine, “that some one could have the care of Bappis who would have his good at heart enough to wisely make him fall in line a bit—for the sake of his whole future, you know! He would be so much happier—don’t you believe?—if he learned to conquer his own splendidly strong will! Of course it’s *easier* to wheedle and manœuvre. I suppose it takes a mother’s unselfish love to do, regardless of one’s ease, what is really best for a child.”

“Bappis isn’t the sort to ‘fall in line,’” smiled Joan. “Not he! He’ll always have a line of his own! Too much like his father *not* to have! We ought to be glad there are *some* people like that—oughtn’t we?—who won’t fall in line. Else how would the world ever move?”

Was this actually Joan who was talking?—having an opinion of her own and frankly expressing it? Randall marvelled.

“Bappis is very lucky,” he unhesitatingly remarked,

"to be in the care of one who is capable of recognizing his innate inability to fall in line."

Dr. Brooks at this point seemed to feel the situation to be a bit strained and came to the rescue.

"By the way, Mrs. Randall," he spoke—and the drawl of his speech did not at all seem to fit the almost feverish brilliancy of his black eyes, "I've forgotten to mention a message my sister charged me to give you to-day—she wants you to let her propose your name for the Eastport Woman's Club. What shall I tell her?"

"She's very kind. What's the club for?"

"For the Improvement of the Condition of the Female Mind of Eastport, I believe—as nearly as I've ever been able to gather."

"Would you advise me to take the treatment?—you think I need it?"

"I'm afraid I don't believe in it. Women's clubs savor too much of educational quackery, you know—a get-culture-quick process. It's the sort of women that are always getting up on high planes and falling off again that go in so strong for this club business! You're not that sort. I don't think you'd make a good club woman, Mrs. Randall."

"Do the charity clubs, too, come in for your condemnation, Dr. Brooks?" Catherine inquired with a lack-interest air. "I'm curious to know, as I'm usually pretty active in them. Shouldn't feel it right, indeed, *not* to be."

"They're worse—if you'll let me say just what I think?"

"I'm not in the least afraid to hear it. I shall—

womanlike, you know—probably be of the same opinion still.”

“Well, then, ladies’ charity clubs—*ach Gott!* The smug, complacent self-righteousness and conscious superiority of their members! The grotesque inconsistency of their principles—’twould move the gods to huge laughter!”

“And you, Judge Randall? You agree with Doctor Brooks?”

“Well, Catherine, a social state in which about one-third of the population is in such straits as to be forced to tolerate the patronage and charity of the other two-thirds, would seem rather rotten and doomed to perish.”

“But the big charity organization here of which Sally is President and in which I am to act for her while she’s abroad—I suppose, then, you won’t be allowing Mrs. Randall to join it?”

“I don’t impose my opinions upon Mrs. Randall.”

“But until your Millennium comes—so long as society is made up of rich and poor—the women of means and leisure who won’t lend a helping hand—don’t you feel,” she turned with a smile to Joan, “a sense of responsibility not only towards the poor, but for the example you set to the whole community, of unselfishness and charity?”

“An example for the whole community—*me!*” repeated Joan ungrammatically. “I’m much more apt to be a warning! And I couldn’t imagine *my* ‘example’ being so important as to give me a sense of responsibility towards other people! Dear me, no!”

"I'm afraid," laughed Catherine, "you are very light-minded, Madame Randall!"

"I'm afraid I am, Miss Tyson. I'd so much *prefer* the *rôle*, of a Warning to that of an Example!—I'd find it so much more entertaining, I'm sure, wouldn't you?" she appealed to the men. "I tried being an Example once or twice—playing the Lady Bountiful by proxy—and instead of feeling as you do about it—that I was illuminating the community—I only felt horribly humiliated for the beneficiaries!—especially when they were grateful and abject."

"Yes? Of course I can understand," said Catherine slowly, thoughtfully, "how your sympathies would go out to—the beneficiaries."

"It is a question," Randall quietly said, though feeling a rage against Catherine, not so much because of Joan's painful flush, as because of such impertinence towards the woman who bore his name and presided over his home, "whether 'light-mindedness' isn't less obnoxious than self-righteousness. Ready, Joan?" he looked inquiringly at her; and she at once laid down her napkin and rose to lead the way into the library for coffee.

The library of Judge Randall's house had always had an air of distinction, with its shelves of literature in every civilized tongue, its interesting pictures, its choice and beautiful relics of travel; and now, added to all this, the rare look of homeliness it had recently come to wear made it a room so satisfying as to invite every sort of intimate experience—friendship, confidences, dreams, deepest absorption in books, domestic nearness.

"By the way," Joan spoke to Randall as they all sat cozily with their cups about the huge fire-place, in which two logs were blazing, "Dr. Brooks has a box for the opera to-night which he generously offers us all. Who will go?"

"I'm afraid I'm too dead tired, Joan—unless," he hastily added, "you want to go?"

"Oh, yes, Dr. Brooks and I are going. I'm having the nurse-girl sleep on the couch in Bappis' room. And you, Miss Tyson?"

"But I'm not dressed, thank you."

"Oh, I didn't think of that. You will excuse me, then, if I leave you here with Mr. Randall?"

"Certainly—don't think of inconveniencing yourself for me—I have to leave any way at eleven o'clock, you know, to meet Mother. I suppose I shall be able to make your husband behave for *that* short time—though he does deserve a *little* indulgence—don't you think?—when his wife runs away from him the first evening he is home after three weeks' absence?"

"I'm sure he won't mind when I leave him in such congenial company. Now, if you'll excuse me," she added, giving her empty cup to the butler, "I'll go up-stairs and get on my wraps. It is time to start, isn't it?" she asked the doctor.

"By all means," he nodded with a glance at his watch, as he rose to hold back the portieres for her, his expressive face betraying helplessly his satisfaction in the situation.

She went away, but returned in a very few minutes,

her wrap over her arm; and Randall rose to lay it about her shoulders.

"I may as well tell you, Judge," said Brooks, his eyes on Joan as he stood before the fire with his coat over his arm, his hat in his hand, "in case you want to change physicians, that I've fallen hopelessly in love with your wife."

"That's one thing, then, that you and I have in common!" Randall perfunctorily returned, without looking at Joan.

It was her smiling departure with Dr. Brooks that yielded him, Randall, the last of the succession of sharp surprises which that night greeted his home-coming.

When some hours later, Catherine Tyson, alone in her room at the LaFayette, reviewed the situation as it appeared to her, it was with a considerable sense of bewilderment. Judge Randall and his wife did certainly have a very clear and comfortable understanding between them, when they could go their separate ways, independently of each other, with such complacency as they had both displayed to-night. Of all queer marriages!

"Unless Joan is a consummate actress, I certainly didn't worry *her* by returning home with her husband—taken up as she is with her fascinating doctor! The way that commonplace girl is landing all the big fish! Why, I don't believe Dr. Brooks could tell you the color of my hair!"

As for Judge Randall, she reflected, he had certainly held himself in check to-night—both in his bearing towards

herself and in the steady resistance he had offered to all her efforts to make him commit himself as to Joan.

"It sounds almost incongruous," she had laughed when they were left alone together in the library, "to be calling poor little Joan Laird 'Mrs. Randall'!"

"Yes," he had assented smiling, "it does."

"I hope the sound yields you pride and joy and all the other proper emotions?"

"Naturally."

"Her *rôle*, now, Arthur—if you'll permit me?"

"Oh, don't mind me!"

"——is to get at you through the doctor."

"'Get at' me?"

"And have you where she wants you."

"And where is that? You really make me curious!"

"I'm certainly curious myself to see what that surprising person will be doing next! You ask *where* she wants you? Where every woman wants her husband—there!" she affirmed, pointing to her feet with her left hand and wriggling her right thumb.

"She doesn't have to work for it—she's already got all I have to give. Now drop it, Catherine, and behave yourself. Come, let us have some music."

He had led her over to the music-room, where they had played and sung and chatted until it was time to go to the depot.

But her sense of defeat to-night only aggravated her sense of injury and increased her infatuation for the one and only man who had ever dared to trifle with her; who had never taken her seriously; who was able to

resist her. And the contempt she had always felt for Joan was fast turning to venom. In short, Catherine Tyson was becoming a dangerous woman—all the more so because of the undoubted courage, the recklessness of her nature.

Hers was a character of splendid potentialities, perverted by ease and self-indulgence; and by the shallow and artificial standards of our modern social life.

III

WHEN, at breakfast the next morning, Randall again met Joan, he found himself watching her warily to note further manifestations of the startling change in her that had revealed itself the night before.

But alone with him, her manner was very much what it had always been—grave, quiet, demure. It was her countenance, however, that proved to him he had not merely dreamed of last night. There was still that soft, bright, happy look, as though her soul, long pent-up and her real self concealed, had suddenly been freed, to rejoice in life and in her youth. She looked as though she were having a hard time repressing herself to the self-effacement she evidently considered required of her in his presence.

It was just after Bappis had been excused from the table to be taken by his nurse to the kindergarten, that the mail was brought in by the butler; and Joan, receiving it from him, quickly separated two letters for herself from the pack and handed the rest to Randall.

He gave a slight start as he recognized the handwriting of the letter on the top of those she passed to him. Five times during his absence had Joan forwarded to him letters bearing that handwriting. It was a feminine hand and the letters were thick. What, he wondered, had she thought about them? Not that it mattered, of course,

what the child thought about anything concerning him! Only—he felt a passing curiosity——

Glancing hastily over the rest of his mail, while he sipped his coffee, he finally opened and read this lengthy epistle from his feminine correspondent, while Joan, sitting opposite him, also sipping coffee, read, with evidently absorbing interest, her own two letters.

She had quite finished both of them, one consisting of several closely written sheets, before she looked up to meet his eyes regarding her thoughtfully, as he leaned back in his chair, his letter from his feminine correspondent held on his knee.

“Joan,” he said, his voice deep-pitched, his face a bit pale, “you noticed among the mail you forwarded to me while I was away, the five letters addressed in a woman’s hand, from Annapolis?”

“Yes?”

“I suppose you wondered with what woman I was carrying on such a flourishing correspondence?”

“Oh, no,” she protested in a tone which said, “I shouldn’t presume to wonder about your private affairs.”

“They were from Bappis’ mother. I have another one this morning.”

“Oh!”

“When she learned that my marriage had actually taken place, she became—well, quite frantic!”

Joan gazed at him with wide-open eyes, but said nothing.

“She writes me almost daily of her determination to

have Bappis. I tell you this for just one reason—to warn you to guard him!”

“I will. But—but——”

“Well? ‘But’——?” he quickly, almost sharply, questioned.

“I will do my best,” she said meekly.

“I depend on you to do just that, Joan. To be as faithful to your trust as you know how to be.”

“I will certainly be as faithful as I know how,” she earnestly answered.

“Thank you.”

He rose, gathering up his mail. “Excuse me, please—I must be off to the office. Ah, by the way, I almost forgot to tell you——” he stopped by his chair for an instant—“Judge Pennington who sits on the Bench with me, you know (or I suppose you know), and Colonel Ridgely, will dine with me to-night.”

“Very well.”

“Look your smartest.”

She half started at that and he saw a faintly troubled look come into her eyes.

“Good-morning.” He reached across the table and shook hands with her ceremoniously—then left the room.

But all the way down town to his office he pondered it—that faintly troubled, almost distressed, look with which she had met his admonition to be well-dressed to-night. It occupied him almost to the exclusion of the sore subject which so heavily weighed upon his heart—the letter from Laura in his breast-pocket.

That letter, by the way, occupied also Joan’s mind,

as during several hours of the morning she busied herself with the directing of her household affairs. So much, indeed, did it trouble her that when late that afternoon, Dr. Brooks, on his way home from his professional rounds, dropped in for a call upon her, she wondered whether it would be very bad taste, or even seeming disloyalty to Judge Randall, to speak to the doctor of her perplexity.

For, in the past three weeks, at Bappis' bed-side, she and this young physician had come to feel extraordinarily, almost perilously, near to each other.

As Randall had surmised, Dr. Brooks had seen Joan at her best, physically and spiritually, in her rôle of sick-nurse. Never had she come so near to looking entirely lovely as, during those night-watches with the doctor, clad in her beautiful Japanese kimona, her brown hair loosely coiled at her neck, she had devotedly ministered to her little step-son. In her genuine anxiety, her bearing, for the first time in all her life, had been free from self-consciousness, had been perfectly spontaneous and natural.

There was also that other element of attraction about her—noted so instantly the night before by Randall and Catherine Tyson—her newly-acquired manner of self-respect, almost of self-sufficiency—the effect, apparently, of the dignity, the independence, of her present position.

And finally, there was, to Dr. Brooks, the subtle lure of mystery; her almost unnatural affection for this child not her own; her rare and always business-like references to her newly-wedded husband; her reticence about herself; a tone and atmosphere of elusiveness that baffled and

absorbed him. She seemed to him, indeed, the embodiment of womanly sweetness and dignity; the realization of all his romantic dreams.

For some days past he had been secretly exulting in a growing conviction that, strange as it might be, she seemed to meet and respond to him as she probably did not to her husband, and this conviction had naturally been confirmed last night by her going off alone with him to the opera when Judge Randall had but just returned home after three weeks' absence. Her doing this had, in fact, both startled and thrilled him.

It had also seemed to him a sufficient justification of his playing with fire this afternoon in again calling on her.

She met him with such frank and radiant pleasure at his coming that he had a hard time restraining his impulse to shock her by seizing and kissing her.

It was nearly seven o'clock and she was already dressed for the evening, in the same gray crêpe gown she had worn the night before. As she had just succeeded, she informed him, in reading Bappis to sleep, she was now quite free to "visit" with him until her husband should return with two dinner guests.

"What a beautiful ruby!" Brooks exclaimed at sight of the gem which glowed below her throat, as they sat down before the library fire. "It actually seems," he added, his remarkably brilliant eyes fascinated by the jewel heaving on her breast, "to be alive, to be part of *you!*"

"A gift from Bappis," she smiled. "My reward for

pulling him through his illness! It came in his father's trunk."

"Ah! There's chicken-pox next door—send Bappis over there to call! You might get a diamond tiara next time!"

"You'd have to hold out a stronger bribe than jewelry to tempt me to crime, seeing I don't like decking myself out with ornaments."

"Is that why," he curiously inquired, "you wear no wedding or engagement ring?"

"Well, n—no," she said, flushing. "We were married so—so hastily, you know—we were engaged only about a week!"

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes."

"Had you known each other long?"

"Not very. Less than a month."

"How did you manage in that short time to become so extraordinarily fond of Bappis—not to mention Bappis' father?"

"But I had known Bappis long before I knew his father."

"You couldn't be fonder of the boy if he were your own!"

"You see, it was a case of two lonely, heart-hungry creatures finding each other."

"You refer to yourself and the Judge?"

"You know I mean Bappis!" she quickly answered. "I believe," she added thoughtfully, "that the strongest feeling I am capable of is my love for children. It

amounts to a passion with me. And Bappis responded to my overtures so overwhelmingly!"

"But why," he demanded impetuously, "should *you* ever be 'lonely and heart-hungry'? You who are so—so sweet!" he burst out. "Who could be near you and not care for you, cherish you!"

The color mounted to his forehead as he spoke, and the jewel on Joan's bosom heaved and fell, as with round, child-like eyes she gazed at him.

"No one has ever thought of me like that. You are the first! That's why," she said pensively, "I love so to have you by me. You always make me feel that you really do like me and are actually *interested* in me—and it's a novel and a wonderful experience to me—and certainly most soothing! You are to me what a nice, warm spot near the kitchen stove is to a cat—a wet cat, too!"

"Well! Thanks!"

"You almost make me purr!"

"What do you mean, you a bride of only two months, by telling me I am the first man to tell you you are—lovable?"

"Because you *are* the first," she quietly answered—and there was, for a moment, a palpitating silence between them.

"Dr. Brooks," Joan broke it, "I wonder if I dare to ask you about something that troubles me to-day—to get your view of it?"

"Why not, my dear Mrs. Randall?"

"It seems almost like disloyalty to Mr. Randall for me to mention it, but—somehow I can't put it from me. I

feel such a pressing need of seeing it with another's eyes!"

"Nothing could make me happier than to serve you, if it's in my power to."

"It's about—Mr. Randall's wife."

"Mr. Randall's wife?"

"I mean of course the other one."

"Sounds Turkish, doesn't it? Well?"

"She is frantic," Joan said with constraint, "to have her child. She always has been. And now that he's been given to a step-mother, she can't stand it! I feel somehow so wicked to be standing between that mother and her divine right!"

Dr. Brooks' face became as grave as her own as he heard her. "But you didn't come into this blindly, did you?" he gently asked.

"I know nothing of her; nothing of the cause of the divorce."

"Don't you think you are a bit late, beginning to inquire into all that *now*?"

"It never seemed to matter until—until now—when I am almost daily warned to guard Bappis from being stolen by her!"

"It's devilish—devilish!" Brooks exclaimed in a low, indignant tone. "That poor woman!"

"Oh! It looks that way to you? I was in hopes you could comfort me—could tell me she was probably unworthy of her son and husband and that I need feel no scruples."

"No, I can't! Because, you see, Mrs. Randall, I happen to know this story from the inside, having been

my father's assistant at the time of the trouble and he having been the family physician here. So I know it as no one else except those intimately concerned know it. Randall himself doesn't realize that I know. I am sorry—more than sorry," he added gravely, "that I cannot comfort you!"

"You think she *ought* to have her child?"

"Never had a woman a stronger right!"

"But Mr. Randall's right?"

"I should offend and hurt you if I said what I think."

"No, no—I *must* know what you think!"

"Then what I think is that Randall certainly forfeited his right!"

"Oh!" she breathed, "I wish I had not asked you! I'd rather *not* know!"

He did not answer and there was an instant's silence between them.

"But go on, please," she presently begged him. "It is cowardly of me to shrink from knowing. Tell me—you remember Mrs. Randall well? What kind of woman is she?"

"A woman one could not forget! A handsome, queenly creature, but dignified almost to stiffness and rather unapproachable. The sort of woman a man would put on a pedestal and worship—she appealed so tremendously to the imagination. Perhaps *too* fine for human nature's daily food! Therein, I suspect, lay the trouble."

He pulled himself up short and turned a quick, apprehensive look upon Joan.

"Forgive me! You don't *want* me to tell you all this, surely!"

"I do. Please go on."

"I am not hurting you?"

"That doesn't matter. I must know—for the sake of Bappis' mother. Are you aware that Mr. Randall repeatedly begged her to return to him and Bappis—and that she refused? It was that which seemed to—to justify me!"

"But she could not return to him!"

"Oh! But Mr. Randall is incapable of anything base!" cried Joan, "and nothing short of his being base and cruel, I should think, *could* keep her from her child!"

"I am the last person in the world who should talk of this to you, Mrs. Randall—I have always been too entirely in sympathy with Bappis' mother."

"I can't believe that you do Mr. Randall justice!"

"Naturally you can't."

"I shall ask him for the whole story! If I am to go on keeping Bappis from her I must know!"

"You ought to know!"

"And yet," she said despairingly, "as you say, what good will it do me *now*, to know?"

"Your knowing may lead you to persuade Judge Randall to give Bappis to his mother."

She flushed painfully as she hastily answered. "That I could not do!"

"You mean you could not part with the boy?" he asked, regarding her curiously.

"It would be hard to part with him," she answered

evasively. "But—well, I know Mr. Randall *could* not be persuaded to give him up to his mother! Bappis is the very core of his heart! Oh! If you knew!"

"And if *you* knew, Mrs. Randall, all that——"

He stopped, thrust his hand into his breast pocket and drew out a thick letter.

"Mrs. Randall," he spoke with a repressed intensity, as he held the letter and looked down into her face, "two weeks ago I had a letter from Bappis' mother, imploring me to help her get her child. I answered that since I had met you I believed your very love for the boy would be her greatest ally; that if you knew her story, you would and could use your influence with Judge Randall to persuade him to make her at least *this* reparation; that as of course professional honor prohibited me from repeating the story to you, *she* was the only one from whom you could learn it. Her response is here——" He tapped the letter on his knee. "This is her story—written by her for you!"

"Oh!"

Joan's face had gone white and her eyes were almost terrified. "I am afraid to read it!"

"I have had this letter more than a week. I have not had courage to give it to you. You see, since I first wrote to her, two weeks ago, I have grown to know you so well, and to care very much for your happiness. So—I have not given you this letter. But now that you yourself ask me for the story—here it is."

Joan's hand was cold as she silently took it. She

recognized the handwriting as that of the letters she had daily forwarded to Judge Randall during his absence.

"If I am making you suffer!" said Brooks remorsefully. "And yet surely, some time you would have to hear it all! Laura Randall is too desperate to stand by and let this thing go on!"

"But for four years she has let it go on!"

"Three years. The first year she was a nervous wreck, an invalid. For three years Judge Randall has withstood her pleading for her child!"

"And for three years she has withstood his pleading with her to return to him and her own son!"

"But——"

The sound of the opening and closing of the front door, then of heavy footsteps and of men's voices in the hall outside the library, interrupted them.

The doctor rose, picking up his coat and hat from a chair. Joan also rose, looking white and worried.

"Mrs. Randall," Brooks held out his hand, "never forget, I beg you, that I stand ready always to help you in any way I can!"

"Thank you, Dr. Brooks!"

The portières before the library door were pushed aside and Randall's broad shoulders and handsome head, his face tingling from the autumn evening air, appeared. He was followed across the room by Judge Pennington and Colonel Ridgely.

Joan, holding her letter with the addressed side of the envelope against her skirt, went forward to meet them.

IV

RANDALL, with a passing sense of annoyance at Joan's having been so heedless of his admonition to make herself "smart" as to appear again in that dingy gray crêpe, and with also a vague sense of the unfitness of Brooks' being again with her, went upstairs, after Brooks' hasty departure, leaving her with his two friends while he changed for dinner and stopped in the nursery to see Bappis.

He had not failed to notice Joan's distraught, excited aspect. Was the state of things between her and Brooks going to be serious?

Her efforts to conceal that letter in her hand had also not escaped him. She was having a history of her own it seemed! This was certainly a contingency he had not thought it necessary to take into account—that Joan would be having a love affair! Well, it did not matter, of course—she was free to do as she pleased—so long as what she pleased did not interfere with Bappis' welfare or the comfort of their home.

By the time he returned to the library all signs of her trouble or whatever it was that had made her look so worried—had, he observed, disappeared, and he found her entertaining the two men he had left on her hands, with the same amazing vivacity she had displayed the night before; and the men, gray-haired old Judge Pennington and portly, middle-aged Colonel Ridgely, certainly appeared to be enjoying it. They had been discussing the

threadbare theme of Woman Suffrage, Joan's young convictions on the subject seeming, to herself at least, entirely fresh and original.

The discussion was continued with spirit even after they were seated at dinner.

"You don't take into account," the conservative elderly Judge argued over his soup, "that woman is a creature of sentiment rather than intelligence and that therefore her sphere should be confined within those areas of life where only her natural gift can have play."

"Heaven help her!" smiled Joan. "You'd wall her up with her sentiment! That's the narrow 'area' she's trying to get out of! Give her something worth thinking about, that her activities may go out—not as now, sentimentally and mischievously—but intelligently and strongly!"

It had all been said many times before, but never with a more earnest air of uttering newly discovered truth. Randall found himself much diverted in listening.

"All the same," persisted Judge Pennington, "it is only the old time charming woman who is governed primarily by her emotions that does her duty these days in the matter of giving to the state a half dozen or more lusty citizens! I agree with Napoleon who said that the woman he most admired was she that was mother to the greatest number of children!"

"The mother of many children in these days is certainly not governed by her intelligence—whatever she is governed by!" Joan astonishingly affirmed. "The intelligent woman now knows that to produce a family in excess

of the means at her command for equipping them well for life, is to tend towards deterioration; that to merely turn them loose on Society, untrained, unequipped, is a *drain* on the state, and that she therefore becomes not a producer, but a parasite! Why, the complexities of modern civilized life make it an immense undertaking to properly rear *one* child to meet the frightful strain and pressure! A large family in moderate circumstances is perfectly disastrous; for untrained children simply become 'waste products of human life,' as the Economists say."

Randall, during these remarks, stared at the speaker as though he had never seen her before.

"I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Randall!" Colonel Ridgely stated, with admiring eyes on the bright, flushed face of the lady at the head of the table. "And, indeed, large families are no longer the necessity to the state they once were, since universal war does not now constantly drain the population; and science and sanitation have practically banished pestilence and enormously reduced infant mortality; and since the invention of machinery makes one man do twenty men's work. Children used to be a *profitable* investment. The father who had twenty children to become warriors and laborers was rich in that possession. Now, twenty children would drive most men to the poor-house or to suicide! If families were now as large as they used to be, there'd be an over-populating that would be more disastrous than a decreasing one. What the state needs *now* is not many men, but *fit* men—well-born, well-trained; men of special and costly training for the higher work of life."

"And," said Joan eagerly, yet with a touch of reserve that lent dignity to her speech, "motherhood should really be a lofty privilege permitted only to the fit."

"And fatherhood as well," pronounced Ridgely with conviction.

"And so," Joan added more quietly, "woman's former labors being taken away, the heavy burdens of large families of children, the household work which had to be performed without all the modern aids of machinery—the spinning and weaving and heating and lighting and what-not—it comes about that she *must* find new fields of activity—or become a parasite, a degenerate!"

"Well, now, Joan," Randall spoke at last, regarding her still with that look of never having seen her before, "it seems to me *you* have your hands full, quite in the old-fashioned way—running a house and taking care of a child and a man!"

"But in a few years Bappis won't need me. And I shall still be young and strong. And even now I'm hardly busy enough to keep me out of mischief, household work these days being such a small fraction of what it once was. And," she added slowly, "there are many women these days, you know, to whom marriage doesn't appeal—because, after all, what is it at best but what you say—settling down to take care of a man!"

"And you a bride, Mrs. Randall!" Judge Pennington protested, his sharp old eyes looking at her rather wonderingly.

"Behold on what prosaic days are we fallen!" said Randall, sipping his wine. "And before you were

married, Joan?" He put the question casually. "With such opinions as you hold, it's a wonder you didn't go in for a 'career' of some sort."

"I wasn't equipped. And couldn't afford to become equipped. You see, I was 'a waste product'!"

"And you didn't mind being 'a waste product'? Because you remember the opportunity was several times offered you——"

He paused tentatively; and though his tone had been carelessly inquisitive, his eyes searched her face as though they would probe her to the core.

"They were not the sort of opportunities I was looking for," she answered.

Randall deemed it wise to change the subject.

His friends lingered late that night and talk flowed freely and animatedly, though he himself was rather silent, his attention too much taken up with listening—listening in silent and secret amazement—to Joan's bright remarks. Joan making bright remarks! *Why* had she been so different at Beechlands last summer?

Joan, on her part, considering Randall as he appeared beside other strong men, felt how he did tower above them! What a look of power he had!—the power accrued not only from erudition in the law, but from cultured instincts and far-reaching thought. And—in spite of that letter thrust into the bosom of her gown, against which her heart was beating to-night—she felt a faint, exultant pride even in her very small possession of this man whom the world called her husband.

When their guests had departed, with reiterated and

enthusiastic congratulations on Randall's domestic felicity, Joan, not lingering alone with her husband for a moment, bade him good-night at once and started up-stairs.

But he stopped her hasty flight.

"Joan?"

She paused with her hand on the banister. "Yes?"

"Will you come into the library for a few moments? I want to speak with you."

"Certainly."

He led the way back into the room, and they sat down.

V

"You don't mind tobacco smoke, I believe?"

"Not at all," Joan answered, her whole bearing, the moment she was alone with him, changed from glowing animation to the subdued self-effacement with which he was so much more familiar.

"Any way, I'm sure," he said quizzically as he lit his pipe, "that Judge Pennington thought this room needed fumigating—with all these 'immoral' books about!"—pointing to a popular recent work on the White Slave traffic which lay on the table at his elbow, a copy of Henry James' "What Masie Knew," and one of Hichens' "Bella Donna." "You seem," he said with a lift of his eyebrows, "to have a taste for books that are called 'immoral'?"

"Oh," she said sweetly, her childlike eyes gazing at him innocently, "we all do; every—damn one of us!"

He stared—then bent back his head and laughed.

"And," she gently added, "I didn't bring these 'immoral' books into the room—I found them here. And I wouldn't call any one of them 'immoral,' anyway; would you? This book, for instance," she said with a flash of her eyes as she picked up the White Slave work, "fairly maddened me to rise up and *do* things to stop it! Why, I shouldn't wonder if I—made a speech!" she ended as though threatening to go to the very limit.

"A speech? But to whom? When? Under what auspices?" he grinned.

"But every woman *ought* to know of these dreadful things, for when all the women know and realize, it will be stopped!"

"You are sanguine!" he shrugged. "Of course," he smiled slightly as he leaned back in his chair, crossed his legs and smoked, "I don't call these books 'immoral'—a most ridiculous English word!—more variously misused than any word in our tongue!—applied to any and everything that might much more properly be labelled illegality, bad taste, inexpediency or uncleanness."

He paused. She did not reply; she sat with her hands folded in her lap, her eyes following the smoke from his pipe, as she dutifully waited to hear why he had requested her to stop down stairs.

"I want to ask you a question, Joan." He held his pipe away from his mouth and looked at her. "I want to ask you what has so metamorphosed you? This is not Joan Laird I see before me!"

"No," she pensively admitted, "it isn't."

"I don't recognize the young lady I—led to the Altar."

"I hardly recognize myself, Judge Randall."

"Well? How do you explain it?"

"It's rather subtle. I don't know that I *can* explain it. But," she asked anxiously, "I hope that even if I am changed, I am not in any way disappointing you?"

"I am rather relieved to find that you are not quite so pious as you've always looked, Joan!"

"Oh, do I look 'pious'?" she inquired perturbed.

"Demure, I should have said. And the 'subtle' cause of this Jekyll-Hyde transformation—if you please?"

"Well," she said meditatively, "for one thing, I no longer have to feel my way—I've reached my goal."

"You're now what is known as 'a settled lady,' are you? Was that the 'goal' to which you were feeling your way?"

"Financial independence was the goal; a rich marriage the only available means," she quietly repeated. "I never really expected to accomplish it."

Randall looked at her for a moment uncertainly. "Accomplish *what*?"

"A rich marriage."

"Had your affection for Bappis, then, *anything* to do with your consenting to marry me?"

"It had everything to do with your *asking* me to marry you, and it, at least,—my affection for Bappis—is genuine."

"My faith in that fact is what I staked everything upon, in this venture, you know."

"Yes, I know. And I hope you feel, Judge Randall, that your faith is justified. For it is my consciousness of having succeeded in meeting your requirements, of having at last found a niche in the world which seems truly mine, where I am really needed—it is this, I think, that has 'metamorphosed' me; given me a sense of freedom that makes everything in me bloom out—things which I did not know *were* in me——"

She stopped short, looking down thoughtfully at the hands folded loosely in her lap.

"But you could have come to the same freedom through the positions offered you—by Sallie's husband and by me—which you refused?" he said questioningly.

He saw a faint color creep into her face at this, but she did not lift her eyes to reply to it; to explain her strange inconsistency.

"Why," he inquired, beginning to smoke again, "if I may ask you, Joan, did you so strongly desire 'a rich marriage'?"

"I knew the pangs of poverty."

"There are worse things than poverty; and better things than wealth. It is hard to believe that one who looks so—demure—can be so ambitiously worldly!"

She did not reply.

"But then," he went on, "if it was money you wanted, why in the name of the gods don't you use it now you've got it?"

"'Use it'?" she repeated with a deep flush of embarrassment which he found rather unaccountable.

"You dressed more smartly, Joan, last summer than you do now."

"My mother," she answered falteringly, "doesn't of course think it necessary, now, to send me things."

"Well, by the Lord!" he exclaimed, "I should rather hope she didn't! I'm asking you why in the world you don't buy yourself some clothes?"

"I buy the best I—I can afford."

“‘Afford’! Are you a miser? A gambler? Or, if I don’t give you enough?”

“Enough! Oh! You are more than generous to me! I——”

“Well? Then you’ve been gambling in stocks? Or giving nobly to the Cause of Suffrage? If you can’t ‘afford’ better clothes than you’re wearing, then for goodness’ sake, go down town to-morrow and open an account at Stewart’s.”

“Oh, no, I could not do that! You give me too much *now*, I——”

“But you must dress better, you know. I can’t have you looking shabby.”

“I’m awfully sorry! But—I *have* spent nearly all my month’s allowance—I—I thought my clothes would do.”

“Well, they won’t do.”

He did not press her further to account for her allowance—that was of course her own private affair—but he laid down his pipe, went to his desk and wrote a check.

“There,” he said as, on his way back to his easy chair, he stooped to lay it in her lap, “*spend* that, don’t gamble, donate or hoard it.”

“I will *borrow* it from you on my next month’s allowance—since you want me to have new things at once.”

“Nonsense!” he said rather impatiently, taking up his pipe and lounging back in his chair, “you don’t have to keep yourself within an allowance. The allowance was your own suggestion. Understand that you are at all times to get yourself what you need and want.”

“Thank you,” she responded in a tone of uncertainty.

"If there are any thanks due," he asked with a short laugh, "what becomes of that 'financial independence,' that 'sense of freedom' which you say has proved such a fertile soil for unsuspected brilliancy?"

"But," she responded with a forced air of courage, though looking greatly troubled, "that sense of freedom is very precious to me—the most precious thing I've ever known in my life except my love for Bappis and his for me! And if I am to keep it, Judge Randall," she went on, her tone becoming pleading, "I must not feel obliged to account for the allowance you give me for my services here,—not be forced to spend that allowance in a way I prefer not to."

"Certainly you must not. But if the exigencies of your position require better clothing than your allowance permits—the case is simple—we'll increase the allowance."

"The allowance is ample to clothe me in purple and fine linen!—if I so choose to spend it. I have better uses for it."

"Part of your 'service' here, then," he said firmly, "*must* consist in appearing properly garbed. I insist upon that, Joan. So an increase of allowance you've got to accept."

"No—it would not be right! Because I use the money you give me for—I—send most of it to my mother, Judge Randall!"

The pained, proud sensitiveness of her face held him silent, almost spell-bound, for an instant.

"You will think," she added hastily, "that I impose upon you—to be letting you in for what was certainly

not part of our agreement—the support of my mother. But,” she insisted with a gentle dignity, “*I am supporting her!*”

“By dressing my wife shabbily. I can’t permit it.”

Suddenly he realized that bright tears were glistening in her eyes and he quickly spoke. “I’ve been very thoughtless, Joan, not to have arranged before now for your mother. We will settle an income upon her at once.”

“No—no!” she exclaimed in a low, tense voice, dabbing a handkerchief to her glistening eyes. “All my life I have been accepting charity—I’ll never, never accept it again! Neither for myself nor for my mother. I will not!”

“Child, child,” he spoke soothingly, “you know perfectly well that your services to me are priceless; that I can never make you anything like an adequate return for them. My providing for your mother is a matter of my signing a few checks—while *you* are giving your young life, your heart’s blood, to Bappis! So, then,” he rose abruptly and spoke authoritatively, “your mother is going to be taken care of. And you will clothe yourself properly. Now,” he concluded, holding out his hand to her, “go to bed.”

She rose submissively, placed her hand in his and looked up at him with solemn eyes. “I do thank you, Judge Randall, with all my heart for—for valuing my services so highly. I shall try very hard always to be worthy of your kindness! Good-night.”

She drew her hand from his and walked away. He stepped after her to hold back the portiere from before the

door. "Good-night," he bowed—then went back to his chair before the fire.

He sat long that night over his pipe by the fire, a book in his hands which he did not read, so interested he found himself in trying to piece together the tangled thread of Joan's inconsistencies.

"'Every damn one of us'!" he chuckled. "Astonishing child! I certainly did not know the maiden I was wedding out there at Beechlands!"

Had the "rich marriage" ambition been a scheme between her mother and herself, Joan agreeing to pay back the supplies for the fray as soon as she had "made good" by "accomplishing" her rich marriage? "I never thought I'd accomplish it," the child had told him with surprising candor.

"Well! She's certainly an odd mixture!" was his baffled conclusion as he rose to go to his room.

Joan, meantime, in kimona and slippers, was lying on her bed reading, with breathless interest and burning cheeks, the manuscript which related the story of Arthur Randall's divorce.

VI

"To shield from disgrace the name of my son's father, the story of my divorce has never passed my lips, and the only living people who know it are Mr. and Mrs. McCord and Dr. Brooks. Not even to my lawyer was I willing to tell the shameful story, since I cared even more to protect my boy from having a disgrace like this follow him all his life than to have him again in my arms. You may be able to measure, from this fact, how great is my horror of giving publicity to this story, for though you are not a mother, you are at least a woman. And you will realize, too, how great the faith I am venturing to put in you, an utter stranger to me, when I here give into your keeping this story—trusting you to guard it as I have guarded it; and this I am doing in the agonized hope that you may be led, when you know the truth, to persuade your husband to give me back my son; or be moved yourself by the tragedy of my marriage to restore my baby to me.

"Our married life up to the time my boy was two years old was ideally happy. To me at least it was so, and I saw no signs of its being otherwise to my husband. I believed in him so absolutely and honored him above all men I had ever seen. I confidently believed him to be as profoundly happy, as wholly satisfied in me as I was in him, unfaithfulness or disloyalty being so foreign to my own nature that I could not conceive of them in one so near to me.

“ You can never know what it costs me to tell you my story—the destruction of my faith in the nobility of my husband—the dragging down of my highest ideals into the very mire—the cruel robbing me of my child!—but I am willing to pay the cost, in the faint hope that you may be moved to help me.

“ It was when my little Arthur was two years old that Mr. Randall was taken ill with what proved to be an extremely severe case of typhoid fever. Mrs. McCord took charge of the baby for me at her home while I, with a trained nurse, gave myself up to the nursing of my husband. I soon broke down under the strain of sleepless nights and terrible anxiety; and a second nurse, a man, was employed to assist the woman.

“ The woman nurse—a Miss Dorsey of Annapolis—was a young and very pretty creature, a wonderful nurse and utterly wrapped up in her work. I felt the deepest gratitude to her for her self-sacrificing devotion to her patient, for I was sure it was that, only, which was pulling him through.

“ When the danger was over and he began to convalesce, the man was discharged and Miss Dorsey assumed the entire responsibility of the case. I was very anxious, now, to take my share in the nursing, but I was assured by Miss Dorsey that the two things essential to averting a relapse were a careful diet and absolute quiet and that my too frequent or prolonged presence in the sick-room was so bad for Mr. Randall as to endanger his life. So, at the sacrifice of my great longing to be constantly with him, I staid away a great deal, to the mystification, I afterwards

learned, of my doctor who knew nothing about this regulation of Miss Dorsey's—a regulation arranged by her and Mr. Randall for their mutual enjoyment.

“Not the slightest suspicion came to me of there being anything wrong in the situation—though when I *was* occasionally permitted to enter the sick-room, Mr. Randall seemed to me to be steadily getting so much stronger that I found it hard to understand why my presence should be so dangerous for him. But my faith in Miss Dorsey was absolute and my gratitude to her unbounded—until one day I made a discovery.

“To be brief—for I find I cannot tell you this story in all its harrowing details—my husband became the lover of this young woman, there in my very own home. When I discovered it and ordered her from the house, she refused to go—and when I appealed to my husband, he refused to *let* her go. They left me no alternative but to go, myself, from my home.

“Meantime, my sister-in-law, Mrs. McCord, had taken my boy to the seaside, and I found, to my utter consternation, that when I asked her to send him to me, at my father's home, she, under her brother's influence, absolutely refused to do so. He was taken to his father and given into Miss Dorsey's care.

“Ever since, for four years, I have been trying to get back my child! Though I was able to secure a divorce without any trouble, I could not, unless I could bring myself to face a public scandal, secure the ‘custody’ of my child. And, as I have said, I have not been willing to

expose before the world, in the low vulgarity of this horrible story, the father of my son.

"What Miss Dorsey's subsequent relations were to Mr. Randall I never knew nor cared to know. What became of her, or whether she is even now alive, I don't know.

"Since the day that I left his house I have never laid eyes on the man that was my husband—the man who for four years, forgetting all that I once was to him, has imposed upon me the anguish of a cheated motherhood by keeping from me the son I bore him!

"You will see that not even to regain my child could I return to him. *How* could I? He has over and over again begged me to return to him—but only for little Arthur's sake—he himself admits the impossibility of expecting me to live with him as of old.

"If with the truth before you, you are now moved to any sympathy for a woman you have never seen but who, you will realize, has suffered long and deeply—if you will plead for me that my boy be given back to me—then, may God, when He gives you a son of your own, bless you.

"LAURA CLAIBORNE RANDALL."

VII

JUDGE RANDALL found it rather difficult to be civilly attentive to the remarks of his dinner companion—who happened, by the way, to be the vague Mrs. Tyson—so interested he was in contemplating Joan in her first appearance, since her marriage, in Eastport society, the occasion being a small and select dinner-party given in her honor by Mrs. Ridgely and made up of Eastport's choicest social lights—and Eastport considered its choicest to be very choice indeed. Yet here was the once shy, inarticulate Joan leading the table-talk, even under the very shadow of such highly-reputed entertainers as their hostess, who was the daughter of an eminent United States senator; Catherine Tyson, known for her wit and repartee no less than for her personal charms; John Henry Nelker, the humorous writer of whose world-wide celebrity Eastport was so justly proud; the scholarly President Moore of the local college; Dr. Brooks with a growing reputation throughout the State as a genuinely scientific physician and surgeon; and several others of equal note and "choice-ness." Randall's sense of humor was touched by the spectacle of the aforetime disregarded Joan outshining even Catherine Tyson at whose hands she had been wont to suffer patronage and slights.

He had no reason to-night to be dissatisfied with his wife's garb. He had been secretly astonished when, as he had waited for her to join him in the library, she had

suddenly appeared before him in festive array—for in spite of the simplicity she still affected in the new clothing she had been buying, her exquisite daintiness and the fine, pure lines of her face and form in the white, gauzy, diaphonous robe she wore had rather taken his breath.

“How blood will tell!” had been his quick inward comment. “Only one born of a good race *could* look just like that!”

In the carriage, on the way to Mrs. Ridgely’s, something which, ever since the night he had spoken to her about clothing herself better, he had vaguely noticed, now became a very definite impression—he was sure that Joan had looked, since that night, just a shade less bright and happy; a thin veil seemed to have fallen over the radiance of her face; and just now, seated opposite him in the carriage, she appeared to him pensive and troubled. Several times since that midnight talk, he had caught her looking at him in the strangest way—with wide, wondering gaze, almost with a hint of fear in the depths of her dark eyes. She had beautiful eyes—very beautiful.

Was it possible she was fretting under a feeling that she was “a recipient of charity” in wearing the expensive clothing he had insisted upon? But what sort of a specimen of femininity was she if fine apparel made her sad? Was it not much more probable that this unhappiness had something to do with Brooks?

It had been with deliberate intent that he had taken the seat opposite instead of beside her in the carriage. He had wanted to look at her. And there was another reason why it seemed inadvisable to sit beside her.

"It's to be hoped," he had remarked to her during the long drive—for Mrs. Ridgely lived in the suburbs—"you are not very fond of social gadding, Joan, for I'm not! These affairs seem to me such a waste! I'd so much prefer being at home in our cosey library—with Bappis asleep overhead. How do *you* feel about it?"

"My home-life and a few friends are enough for me. Oh, it *is* such a relief to be at last situated where I can *afford* to drop things that bore me! To be able, without the least loss, to turn my back on society if I choose!"

"'Loss?' Loss of what?"

"Loss of that which women—most women and a few men—value above everything else in life—a recognized social position."

"You value it so highly?"

"I certainly do value the prestige which makes me independent of it!"

"Independence of such superficialities should come from within—not from circumstances—don't you think?"

"Ralph Waldo Emerson," she smiled.

"But, Joan, you don't *look* like a shallow woman, you know!"

"That's something to be thankful for!"

"You really think, do you," he inquired, "that the 'social position' you so perilously maintained as Miss Laird was worth the sacrifice you made for it?"

"I certainly do not!" she breathlessly answered, speaking so fervently, so from the depths of her soul, that he was taken aback.

"Then why in the name of God, child, did you regulate your life by such a vulgar ambition?"

"I—I had no choice," she said sadly, her eyes down-cast.

"Oh, but come!—no one is ever forced to be——" He hesitated.

"Vulgar, superficial, supine? But sometimes one is forced to choose between two evils——"

The carriage stopped under the porte-cochere of the Ridgely's house, and Randall found himself surprised by his own sense of annoyance at the necessary suspension of their conversation, for he had been keen to hear what she had to say for herself on this point which, the longer he knew her, seemed the more inexplicable.

And now, at Mrs. Ridgely's dinner table, under the stimulus of the champagne—or was it Dr. Brooks' presence at her side that afforded the stimulus?—Joan's pallor and melancholy of the last few days were gone and she was entertaining the entire party with her droll account of Bappis' parting from her this evening.

"He does so hate to have me go away that the very sight of an evening gown is offensive to him. This evening he got out of bed to watch me dress, and when I submitted myself for his approval, he dumbfounded me by regarding me most disdainfully and remarking with the most scathing scorn, 'Poor child of vanity!'"

Her imitation of Bappis' tone and manner was delightful to those who knew the boy.

"You ought to feel very conceited indeed," Catherine Tyson, on Randall's right, remarked to him, "at the way

you have brought out the unsuspected social gift of your wife!"

"I certainly would be if I could flatter myself that I had done it."

"Is it Brooks, then, who has wrought the transformation? If so, I must say!"

"Must say what?"

"You take it complacently!"

"That little way you have, Catherine, of stepping in where angels would fear to tread!"

"Oh, if it's sacred ground—or a sore point—I beg your pardon!"

"The man on your right is looking wilted at your neglect of him. Let *him* have some of your shafts. He's in that state where he'd let you use him for a foot-ball or a door-mat!"

"And you aren't? Oh, he'll keep. And I don't often have a chance to worry you with my 'shafts.' By the way, do you remember the Miss Dorsey who nursed you when you had typhoid?"

"Vaguely."

"She is nursing Mary Lowndes. I was calling on Mary to-day and she told me she had the nurse you had had."

"Miss Lowndes told you?"

"Yes, Miss Dorsey had told her."

"An excellent nurse," Randall remarked, "as I remember her."

It had not escaped him that, at the mention of Miss Dorsey's name, Joan had, with a slight start, looked across

at Catherine and that her face had gone pale. What did *that* portend?

"Yes," said Catherine, "Mary Lowndes seems perfectly devoted to this Miss Dorsey. She's a remarkably good-looking girl. You remember, no doubt?"

"I never met Miss Lowndes that I know of."

"But I mean Miss Dorsey."

"Oh, Miss Dorsey? As I said—vaguely."

Their attention was caught by the sound of Joan's voice, speaking almost excitedly, as in reply to Mr. John Henry Nelker's chaffing her on a bride's housekeeping, she at once began to relate, with much animation, her absurd experience with a new housemaid whom she was training; and though Joan's voice was always low and soft, it seemed to have an oddly arresting quality, for when she spoke, every one was apt to pause and listen, even though what she said was as trivial as this story of the housemaid who, having been instructed to bring the card-plate up-stairs to her mistress when she admitted visitors, had thoughtfully removed the cards from the plate, obediently carried the empty plate up-stairs and confidently presented it to her lady.

"And having been told," continued Joan, "that this proceeding was futile, she made sure she would perform her feat right the next time, so she brought the second visitor up-stairs bodily!"

"On the card-plate?" facetiously inquired the professional humorist.

"I suppose," Catherine again addressed Randall, "you'll be coming out of your long seclusion now and

going into society, won't you? You'll *have* to—whether you want to or not."

"'Have to'? Oh, Mrs. Randall won't hen-peck me to that extent! Besides, I haven't time for it, you know. No man has who is not a loafer."

"A bride can't very well be going about everywhere without her husband, can she?"

"But I don't believe Joan cares for 'going about' any more than I do."

"Well," smiled Catherine, "she's sufficiently accompanied to-night any way, isn't she—with you and Dr. Brooks both here to look after her!"

Before he could reply, they were again caught up in the general attention turned to Joan who was discussing with the college President at her left the recent novel of Mrs. Ward's which raised anew the problem of the renowned *Robert Elsmere*.

"Isn't it very significant," Joan was saying, "that the same 'problem' which twenty years ago brought forth such world-wide discussion, now doesn't cause so much as a ripple on the placid indifference towards religious questions? What is the significance of the fact that a theme once so pregnant, now can't be galvanized into life? Surely the problem hasn't been settled?—for there are still believers and unbelievers; there are still a clergy and churches as well as sceptics. Why is it," she went on, though her cheeks faintly flushed as she found herself addressing a silent table, "that in these days a novel or a play having a clergyman for a leading character won't go down with the public? A publisher told me that

clergymen can be utilized acceptably in fiction now-a-days only at death-bed scenes and as wicked hypocrites! Yet nearly all of us do still 'love a church, a cowl, a prophet of the soul.' I've wondered about it!"

President Moore, who was philosophical, was quite sure he understood the phenomenon, and while he prosily talked, conversation again became general.

After dinner, as the men smoked in the library, Randall observed how restless Dr. Brooks was; how impatient, evidently, to join the women in the drawing-room; how bored by the discussion of public affairs in which the other men were so interested.

"Without vast aggregations of capital"—a "bloated bond-holder" was rather aggressively attacking him, the Judge, in reference to his recent famous sentence upon a corrupt corporation—"where would be the comforts which the modern man makes use of?—swift and safe travel by land and sea; all the conveniences and time-saving of electricity; literature and art within reach of all; none of these things which mean so much to us would be possible without vast accumulations of capital in a few hands. Combination and concentration are the modern industrial law!"

"Who disputes it? Of course they are," agreed Randall. "No one who rightly reads the times dreams of going back to old-time petty competition. We all realize that vast accumulation of capital is absolutely indispensable to modern conditions. Those 'few hands,' however, that manipulate it will not long continue to do so, Mr. Nestor, for their self-interest alone, nor will they be

self-appointed, but—if our democracy is to live—they will be appointed by the people to manipulate the vast capital of the country for the benefit of the people.”

“That’s nothing but damned rank Socialism, you know, Randall!”

“Well, Nestor, the trust magnates who have built up big industries—while working solely for their self-interest—have, of course, unwittingly benefited society in the vast saving of time and energy that was once uselessly dissipated in the competition of many small industries—and these industrial giants have simply got ready their great industries to be taken over by the government for the benefit of the people. To dissolve these combines is, I do believe, to act with the most stupid blindness! They are an inevitable evolution in the progress of civilization towards a more ideal, a more human, a less brutal, social condition.”

No one agreed with him, and as the discussion waxed hot, Randall simply withdrew from it, recognizing the futility of arguing with men whose minds and souls were enslaved to their self-interest.

“He only is a free man,” he reflected, “who can see a truth which militates against himself.”

When presently they went over to the drawing-room, he saw how promptly Brooks made a bee-line for Joan.

“I’d like to know,” he wondered, “what he expects to get out of it!”

He watched them speculatively as he kept up a perfunctory talk with Mrs. Tyson. Joan had willingly let herself be led away to a far window-seat where very soon

she and her companion seemed lost to everything but each other. Was it possible that their intimacy had advanced to a point where Joan had confided to Brooks the nature of her marriage? If so, of course Brooks might well feel justified in his unreserved attentions to her. But what was *her* idea in thus giving herself over to a friendship with a man?

"Run away, Mother, and talk to Mrs. Ridgely," Catherine ordered her obedient parent as, deliberately deserting her dinner companion, who, Randall had noticed, had been as eager to join her as Brooks had been to get to Joan, she came across the room to the couch where the young Judge sat with her mother.

Randall rose as Mrs. Tyson gave her seat to her daughter, then seated himself again beside Catherine.

"You seem very absent-minded to-night, Arthur."

"On the contrary, I am very much interested."

"In me?"

"What mere male could help being interested in you in that frock? It's simply wrecked the peace of yonder man at the mantel whom you've just abandoned to his despair! See how the miserable wretch is watching you!"

Meantime, Joan, at the farther end of the room, not too engrossed in her companion to be aware of the pair on the couch, wondered, as she looked at them, how Judge Randall *could* smile into the eyes of another woman while, in a distant city, his wife (she did not ever think of *herself* as his wife) broke her heart because of the cruel wrong he did her. What in the world, she wondered,

would he have to say for himself in defense or explanation of his conduct to that suffering woman?

"Shall I ever have courage," she asked herself many times that night, with a troubled heart beneath her outward gayety, "to speak to him about it?"

For until she did do so, she felt she should know no peace, no self-respect.

"I can't put it off! The sooner I plunge in and have it over, the better!"

But the conviction haunted her like a superstition, that with the opening up of that subject between them, her present relations with Judge Randall would have to end.

VIII

AGAIN on their homeward drive, Randall avoided sitting beside Joan. He fully realized that he dared not trust himself. Since she had presented herself before him in the library that night in evening array, he had become aware that though he was not in love with her, the appeal, for him, of her person, her mere physical allurements, was suddenly overpowering; had, indeed, awakened the savage in him; and that he must hold the fierce creature with a grip of iron.

Just now, as from the opposite side of the big carriage he viewed her in all her young loveliness, wrapped in her long white evening cloak, he reiterated to himself that he certainly did not love her—the bare idea was surely preposterous. But—she was a woman and fair; and he was a man and she was his, if he would!

But *was* she his if he would? No doubt, in spite of their compact, she would only be flattered at his desire to break it—so far more pleased (if she were a human woman) than if he adhered to it.

Yet strangely enough, with the awakening of his senses to her feminine charm, there was born in him a reverence for her pure girlhood, a chivalrous instinct to protect it, that would have made him suffer with the damned before he would have alarmed or shocked her.

And then, too, the look in her eyes as they rested upon him just now was a warning. It was that same look

almost of fear, of shrinking, with which, ever since the night of his talk with her about her shabby clothing, she had seemed to regard him. Did she feel to-night (beneath the cold, stern exterior with which he held himself in check) the fire of his blood and did it frighten, repel her?

They drove home in almost absolute silence—inasmuch as he did not invite conversation and Joan never talked with him voluntarily.

But when at their own door he had given her his hand as she stepped out of the carriage and had, in the hall, taken her long wrap from her shoulders and thrown it over his arm, he rather peremptorily stopped her precipitate flight up-stairs.

"Will you come into the library for a few minutes?" he curtly invited her.

"Certainly."

"It is not necessary, you know," he remarked in a tone of irritation as he stepped back to let her pass into the room, "to *avoid* me!"

He thought she looked hurt at his tone and he hastened to make amends.

"Because," he smiled down upon her as he wheeled a chair for her to the lighted fire, "I'm really not dangerous."

A feeble, perfunctory smile answered him as they both sat down.

"To-morrow," he proceeded at once to his purpose in detaining her, "I've got to go to New York again, for a ten days' absence."

"Have you?" she said with polite, impersonal interest.

"You keep it so (to use that word of yours) 'damned' comfortable for a man here at home, Joan, that it's grown to be a nightmare to me to have to go away and sojourn in hotels."

"It would seem inexpedient then," she faintly smiled again as she stretched a small, white-slippered foot to the fender, "to keep you so comfortable."

"Makes it harder to get rid of me?"

Did he only imagine that she blushed guiltily at the suggestion?

"I mean because of the 'nightmare,'" she answered.

"You know," he said, leaning his head against the high back of his chair and stretching out his legs towards the fire, "you are giving me the first taste of home I've had in ten years."

"Ten years? Not so long as that?" she repeated questioningly. "I thought it was only a little over four years since——"

She stopped short and looked at him with puzzled eyes.

"Since," he said quietly, "I lived here in this house with Bappis' mother? Yes."

She continued to gaze at him for a moment. Then an irresistible curiosity, it seemed, impelled her to her first digression from the rôle of a housekeeper who knows her place and she asked him a question—a very personal question.

"And it was not home to you when—when Bappis' mother was—was here?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Never?"

"Never."

"But—but why?"

"Home-making requires a divine endowment, a special genius, Joan."

"In a way, perhaps," she conceded. "But a tent would be home to me with one I loved."

"To you—because you'd have the genius to make it a homelike tent."

He waited curiously to hear whether she would venture to press him further. But she dropped it.

"Will you allow me," she suddenly asked him with a little embarrassed movement of her head, "to have Mother with me while you are away?"

"Don't say 'allow.' Fancy my *permitting* you to have your own mother here! I think," he added, his tone becoming grave, "it highly advisable that you should have your mother here in my absence, inasmuch as I am sure you very much need a chaperone."

The embarrassed color deepened in her cheeks, but she answered him steadily. "Thank you—I shall send for her then—not, however, because I feel the need of a chaperone. Bappis is chaperone enough."

"Send for her by all means—for whatever reason!"

"There's another thing," she said hesitatingly. "If—if my mother comes—she has not seen me since my—since we—married each other——" she floundered hopelessly—what a childish little thing she was anyway, in spite of her occasional display of precocious intelligence!

“‘Since we married each other’?” he repeated.
“Yes?”

“And I would keep it from her that my marriage is—what it is—but people notice that I wear no ring and she will notice and—I should like to have a ring, if you don’t mind, Judge Randall,” she brought it out at last.

“Most certainly you must have a ring if you want one. Get yourself one to-morrow. I’ll leave a check with you.”

But the absurdity of her buying her own wedding ring suddenly struck him and he laughed. “If you prefer,” he said, “I’ll stop at a shop on my way to the station and send one up.”

“Don’t tax yourself like that—all that is necessary is that Mother shall not——”

“Find us out. It would make her unhappy, would it? But *you* are not unhappy?”

He watched her between half closed eyelids as he asked the question.

“That’s the trouble,” she said in a low voice without looking at him. “I’m *too* comfortable and contented here—and with the added consciousness of Mother’s welfare! It makes me—well, I feel as though I just *couldn’t* give it all up!”

“Who asks you to give it all up?”

“Oh, Judge Randall, sometimes I feel it is very wrong to be keeping Bappis from his mother!” she broke forth tremulously.

“That’s my affair, Joan!” he sharply answered. Good God! Was it *this* that was making her look unhappy?

—or was this the loop-hole by which she thought to get away from him and go to Brooks?

“If you had scruples, Joan,” he said almost sternly, “why didn’t you produce them before we ‘married each other’?”

“I didn’t know—I didn’t think—all I cared for was that I was going to have Bappis and a home of my own and the means to provide for my worn-out mother!”

“And that’s all you need care for still. The other matter you have nothing whatever to do with! I can still trust you, Joan?” he demanded.

“Yes,” she breathed, her eyes downcast.

He rose, looking grim and frowning, and with his hands thrust in his pockets, slowly paced the breadth of the room in front of her.

“There is something I feel obliged to admonish you about before I go away,” he said gravely.

“Yes?”

“You have of course, being a woman, some little human fondness for admiration—especially the admiration of men. Eh?”

“A woman that did not have would be weird!”

“‘Weird’—exactly. Very weird! But I feel obliged to warn you, Joan—very seriously warn you—that you must not let this exceedingly feminine weakness lead you into indiscretion. Observe the proprieties at least.”

“The ‘proprieties’? But I thought you, of all men, eschewed the ‘proprieties’!”

“Theoretically, I may perhaps. But when it comes to the women of one’s own household—well, hardly!”

"But have I done anything improper?" she anxiously inquired.

"Don't you think that you allowed Dr. Brooks to monopolize you too much this evening? Wasn't it, to say the least, not quite good taste, seeing you were the guest of honor, to go off alone into a corner and stick there all evening?"

"With you and Miss Tyson 'sticking' in the opposite corner all evening! Oh! I'm afraid we distinguished ourselves—as a family—for 'bad taste'—didn't we?"

Randall grinned, and strolling over to the fire, stood before her, his hands still thrust deep into his pockets.

"Shall it be a compact, then, Joan—I'll not monopolize Miss Tyson or any one else in public, if *you* won't."

"But I thought our very definite understanding was that you—or was it we?—were to be absolutely free."

"Of each other, yes. But we are neither of us free to cause a scandal. Brooks comes here too much. It would be especially injudicious to let him come frequently while I am out of town. You will heed my request in this matter?"

"Naturally! If you will tell me exactly how often he may come?"

"'May come'! I lay down no commands! Your common sense and your sense of honor must guide you."

She looked troubled, but made no answer.

"And the other matter—I have your word that you will remain faithful to the trust, the responsibility I put upon you—to guard my son for me?"

"You have my word."

She spoke so low, he had to bend his head slightly to catch her reply.

A sound overhead arrested them. It was Bappis, who, having waked, was calling for her. Her name was always at his lips the moment his eyes were opened.

She rose and hastened to go to him; and Randall, presently picking up her evening cloak from the back of a chair, slowly followed.

IX

RANDALL's ten days in New York were too absorbingly occupied to admit of his giving any but the most casual consideration to things at home, though not in his busiest hours did he wholly escape the spell under which Joan's feminine daintiness had brought him on that night of the Ridgely's dinner—a spell so potent, so insistent and compelling, that he wondered how, living under the same roof with her, he was going to cope with it. For cope with and conquer it he must. There was a quality about Joan—a delicacy, a remoteness—that would have made it a desecration to “love” her in the common sense when one was not in love with the soul of her.

Three times during his absence she wrote to him of Bappis' well-being; but she wrote of nothing else. She did not mention either her mother or Brooks; he did not even know whether Mrs. Laird had gone to her.

Among the mail she forwarded to him, there were no letters from poor Laura. Was the poor, poor girl giving it up at last? Never, surely, had two people waged a combat more agonizing on both sides than that which for four years he and his son's mother had kept up with scarcely any intermission. If it had been as harrowing upon her as upon him, heaven help her!

It was not until he was on his way home that he found time to wonder what possible new shocks and surprises would this time meet him. But his speculations fell far

short of the reality that was preparing for him, though it did not greet him until he had been home two days, and had quite settled down to the consoling surprise of finding *no* surprises—Bappis being well and happy, Brooks *not* in the drawing-room, Joan looking just as he had left her—an elasticity, a self-confidence in her aspect and manner that her unmarried days had never known—but over which there still hung that impalpable veil of pensiveness which he could not escape associating with her friendship with Brooks.

His very first sight of her as she gave him her hand in the hall—looking maddeningly pretty in a low-necked black velvet dinner gown—stung him to such a desire to hold her in his arms that to save himself he kept his eyes away from her and his greeting was so cold and formal, he feared she would be hurt.

He found, in the next few days, that his only salvation was in keeping out of her presence and burying himself in work; to see her only when he must, at hastily snatched meals. So little, indeed, did they see and speak together that he did not even yet know whether or not her mother had visited her in his absence.

And then came his surprise—his knock-down amazement.

It was just after dinner one evening, when too tired out to wrestle with himself, he yielded to the warmth, brightness and general coziness of the house and its mistress and lingered to have coffee with her in the library—though he knew that in so doing he was jeopardizing the very comfort that beguiled him.

The big logs blazed and crackled in the fireplace before which they sat with their cups. Joan, in one of those babyish white gowns she had worn last summer, looked very childish save for that mature thoughtfulness of her eyes which Randall had come to recognize, but which, last summer, he had never realized, so at variance it had seemed with the positively infantine curve of her mouth and with her invariably negative bearing.

"We shall have to have the Tysons here to dinner, Joan, some time—with Hubert and Ned McCord."

"Whenever you say."

"That is, unless you feel that it's asking too much of you to expect you to receive Catherine—she's none too civil to you! I should hardly venture to suggest your asking them, if I had not heard you last summer, just after some slight from Catherine to you, accept Mrs. Tyson's invitation to visit her."

He said it deliberately—urged by the curiosity that had long possessed him to understand why a girl of such fineness in some respects could ever have been such a parasite.

She colored so sensitively at his words that he felt himself a brute.

"If you only knew," she said breathlessly, "how I hate to remember those things!"

"Then pardon me!" he said hastily. "And if you have the least objection to asking Miss Tyson here, of course she must not be asked."

"If," said Joan smiling, "her treatment of me is not

bad enough to make *you* feel you can't ask her, surely I need not resent it."

"Inasmuch as I swore at the Altar to honor and protect you? Well, I surely won't ask you to invite her if you feel she abuses you!"

"But don't mind me! To be sure, Miss Tyson is not a very agreeable person—nor very interesting; one can more easily forgive unamiability in an *interesting* person; but the Tysons are old friends of your family and *Mrs.* Tyson is very sweet."

"And interesting?"

"Well, she is at least amusing. It's only people that bore me that I find it hard to forgive. *Mrs.* Tyson has a heart. I like her."

"And Catherine bores you?"

"Oh! Infinitely!"

"Why?"

"Her cock-sureness that she and her class are the only elect; that the little cramped ideas of life held by that class are the end of truth; her complacency, her patronizing airs, her cheap ideals!"

"How you hate her!"

"No," Joan answered quietly. "She seems to me too insignificant to be hated—though I suppose she'd be rather surprised to know that I think her insignificant; no doubt you are surprised too and probably amused. But it is my real and honest feeling about her—not pique, as you probably think it."

He rose to take her empty cup, and, as he sat down again, she leaned forward in her chair, her elbow on the

arm of it, her chin on her hand, and looked at him with an intent, starry gaze that made his heart beat thick in his breast.

"I am glad," she began in a voice that slightly quivered, "that you are stopping at home a while this evening—as I have to ask you something."

At once he felt in her tone a note which made him dread to hear what was coming.

"Something," she went on, "which I could never ask you if I did not know your liberal views of such things."

"Such things'? My 'views'? What things?"

"You think it right and justifiable, even one's duty, I believe, to yield to one's nature; to *live*—to the uttermost of one's power; to escape the shackles of conventions."

"Until one does do this, he does not live at all," Randall admitted.

"You said once, 'Stop only at what is ugly, marring.'"

"Did I?"

"I'd like to taste of life! I never *have*—so far."

"And what," he inquired, "is your idea of tasting of life?"

"I want experiences. The freedom this marriage has given me has brought out so much in me that I didn't know was there—that I never thought of—so that I have come to feel I can't be reconciled to going through life without some things—without the great experience of—of motherhood—which this hasty marriage with you would cheat me of! I can't be reconciled to that!"

Randall sat motionless, looking at her, the thumping of his heart almost suffocating him.

"Dr. Brooks," she stated quite simply, "loves me. The only man that ever has. As my marriage is only a form, an appearance, any vital relation I might have with another need not interfere with my fulfilling my whole obligation to you. So, since I can't marry Dr. Brooks, if you would consent to be, before the world, to a possible child of mine, what I am in reality to your child,—a parent—the world would not know. And I should be able to have what I yearn for—experiences, love, motherhood."

"Do you expect me to take this seriously? Or shall I send for an alienist?"

"I am both serious and, as far as I know, sane."

"I thought we had faced the sacrifice you would make—didn't we?—on the night I asked you to marry me?"

"I did not realize—because at that time no man had ever loved me."

"The question is, do you love Brooks?"

"How can I help it when he is good enough to be so devoted to me?"

"How, indeed!" he acquiesced, a tinge of mockery in his tone, his eyes burning bright as they rested upon her.

"But," she reasoned, "I would be a very cold-blooded, ungrateful person *not* to—to care for him in return."

"'To care for him in return' isn't loving him. I don't believe you know what love is!"

"If any one can teach me, he can."

"No doubt! Has he ever—kissed you? He has got that far?"

"Oh, yes," she said reassuringly, "he has kissed me."

"It's a habit with him, is it?"

"Three times in all."

"*Becoming* a habit!"

"He is the only man who ever kissed me."

"Believe me, it's only the novelty, then, Joan, that makes it so pleasing."

"But I didn't say it was 'so pleasing'!"

"Isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"Of course you *told* him he was the only man who had ever kissed you?"

"Oh, yes, he knows that."

"And what does he think of the fact that your lawful husband has never—kissed you?"

"I'd better not tell you—he thinks it in such forcible language!"

"This wild thing you propose—it certainly isn't Brooks' idea?"

"Not his at all! He *derided* it and refused to consider it when I offered it as a substitute for *his* plan."

"And what, please, is his plan?"

"That I ask you to let me go—to divorce me so that he may marry me. He thinks that since this marriage of ours is not a real marriage, your sacrifice in doing this would not be anything like so great as mine in denying myself all that life has to offer a woman—of love, of motherhood."

"I see. So his idea is that you shall leave me?"

"Yes—the only idea he will entertain at all!"

"But why, then, bring me this 'substitute for his plan' and ask me to consent to it if *he* won't consider it?"

"I thought perhaps if he found *you* perfectly willing, his objections would be overcome. Because, you see, he *can't* have me as he wants me—I will not leave you so long as you wish me to stay with you—so kind as you have been to me and my mother! And," she added, that diaphanous cloud falling over her earnest countenance, "I could not desert Bappis."

"If Bappis is so much to you, why doesn't *he* fill your yearning for motherhood and love?"

"I don't see *how* I could love a child of my own more! But——" her eyes fell as she went on—"I suppose, in spite of all my artificial rearing, I am after all a very primitive creature. For I want, more than I ever wanted anything in my life, to bear and nurse a child! I want it so much that I am asking you to consent to—this."

"It seems to be a yearning for maternity, rather than love for the man, Joan, that moves you to make this extraordinary request of me!"

"I can't see why," she said, shaking her head, "you and Dr. Brooks should both think it so extraordinary. He wouldn't even discuss it."

"Which is to his credit, certainly! You actually see no objections yourself to this plan of yours?"

"Not so long as I give you what you want. I would not let anything interfere with that. I would not," she

said, "have entered into any clandestine relation—even if Dr. Brooks had wished it—which of course he did not."

"But you come honorably to your legal husband and ask his consent to your accepting another man as your lover!—and will he kindly please agree to pretend 'before the world' to be the father of your lover's child? Was there ever such another funny, *naïve* child as you, Joan! Not the old-time *ingenu* of the stage, you! An up-to-date one! Joan, I'm glad I married you if for nothing else than not to have missed this! It's so astounding!"

"But when," she argued smiling, "my 'legal husband' never was and never wanted to be my lover?"

"You'd think it a dog-in-the-manger business, would you, if he refused to give you to another? But the thing you want, Joan, would be so—well, to put it very mildly, disorderly!"

"Disorderly?" She considered it. "But Nature herself is disorderly."

"Not when rightly understood. Brooks knows, does he, that you meant to come to me with this request?"

"Yes—but he advised me not to—he was sure you would refuse it."

"And you—what do *you* expect me to do?"

"I can't see the least reason why you should object?"

"My refusal would mean unhappiness for you?"

"It would mean," she said slowly, "that I should greatly regret I had met Dr. Brooks too late!"

Randall rose abruptly. He was very pale. Standing

with his back to the fire, his big, broad figure towered over her.

"Joan," he said, "you must give it up. The thing is not to be thought of. For your own sake—for your youth, your honor, your happiness, your purity—your mother—you must give it up. You are too young, too ignorant of life, to know into what a pit you are proposing to cast yourself! I can't let you ignorantly destroy yourself! Brooks, too, if he loves you, will refuse to let you do this thing!"

"But Ruskin gave up his wife to Millais."

"To give you up absolutely—that's another thing. If your happiness demands it I shall have to do it. But to give you up to a course of secrecy, deception and disorder—no, Joan!"

"A divorce between us would ruin your career. I will not bring that upon you after all you have done for my mother and me. And—I don't want to go away from Bappis."

"Yourself aside, Joan, think of the unfairness to the child born under the conditions you propose! And the unfairness to Brooks—unable to acknowledge his own child!"

She looked startled. "I'm afraid," she faltered, "I had not thought that far!"

"Promise me that you will hold this whole matter in abeyance for six months. Will you?"

"I must if you bid me."

"I do bid you."

"Very well, Judge Randall."

"And meantime, I'll see Brooks."

She said nothing.

"You don't mind my talking to Brooks?"

"Why should I? He is so very capable of handling his own case—of taking care of himself!"

"Have you any idea what an immense astonishment you are to me, Joan?"

"Not more than I am to myself!" she said with a little sigh.

She rose suddenly—and before he could stop her, she excused herself and left the room.

But he had no desire to stop her. Sinking again into his chair before the fire, he pressed his hands to his hot eyes.

What, *what* had held him back from doing that which he so passionately desired to do?—taking her in his arms and telling her that her yearning for motherhood could be satisfied, if she would, without the dangers to which she proposed to subject herself. *Why* had he not done this?

He realized why it was. The very frankness of her surprising proposition so revealed the virgin purity of the girl! And surely the man that loved her, as he verily believed Brooks did, was the one who alone had the right to touch such innocence; to make her a mother.

"Inasmuch at it is love—spiritual love, not lust—that makes the union of a man and woman sacramental!" he affirmed to himself.

But his own feeling for her? He could not escape the bewildering realization that in the past hour it had

undergone an amazing change. Hitherto, desire, held in check by a subtle sense of reverence for the maiden, had been the nature of his passion for her. But now, a burning jealousy of the other man, a fierce protest against any least aggression upon what had suddenly come to appear to him as his most precious possession, shook him to the foundations of his being.

“By God, I *couldn't* give Joan up!”

His own exclamation brought suddenly to his recollection Catherine's assertion, “Her *rôle* now is to get at you through the doctor!”—and his heart bounded with a sudden mad hope that that *was* her *rôle*. But the hope died with its birth; for though men were supposed by women to be blind bats when being “worked” by the subtler sex, he knew, if he knew anything, that Joan was not given to playing *rôles*. If she were, he should only pity and despise her and not be asking himself, palpitatingly, whether he loved her. Any way, people who played *rôles*, however cleverly, did not usually go so straight to their mark as this!—for certainly if Joan's mark had been to win him by exciting his jealousy of Brooks, she had accomplished it! He felt he could kill Brooks in cold blood before he could let him take Joan from him.

“Am I, then,” he asked himself, “actually in love with the child?”

If he was not, why this murderous instinct towards Brooks?—this fierce desire to confront him with the melodramatic threat, “*One of us has got to die!*”

And if he was in love with her, was he too late? Had

she really given her virgin love to his forerunner in the field?

That night, as with fevered blood he lay awake, tormented with alternating passions of misery and of ecstasy, he again recalled some words Catherine had once spoken to him: "Let the right person take you in hand, and you will find yourself as much alive as ever you were."

Well, she had spoken truth; for though the "right person" had not turned out to be the lady who thus prophesied, nor yet the one who had consciously "taken him in hand," nevertheless, he *had* been taken in hand—with the result that he was certainly now alive—tremendously, dangerously alive!

X

BEFORE Randall had had a chance to seek that proposed interview with Brooks, an event happened which made it not only unnecessary, but impossible.

Mrs. Tyson and her daughter, together with Mr. Hubert McCord and his son Ned, had dined formally with the Randalls; and the sense of frustration with which Catherine had come away from that dinner—not only in her continued failure to delicately slight Mrs. Randall and make her jealous—a thing she had once supposed very easy to do—but in her equal failure to gain the closer relation with Randall for which she so passionately longed—had set her to thinking very hard that night, in the seclusion of her room.

It had come to the point where the one thing she wanted of life was that which life was denying her—the love of the only man she had ever known who had been too strong for her. And that his resistance *was* strength and not indifference, did she not have proof? Had he not sought her, delighted in her—kissed her—last summer, even while betrothed to this woman now his wife? It was only that boy of his who had stood between her and the great, unspeakable happiness of winning him. It was even now only the boy. He did not love Joan. It was *she*, Catherine, he loved if he loved any woman. And he was of the type of man, she recognized, who could not live without loving a woman. If, for the past four years he

had lived without it, he was surely, now, at the end of his endurance and ready for a passion which would be all the mightier for this long self-repression. The boy, then, disposed of, sent where he rightly belonged—to his own mother—Joan would be out of the running and Randall would certainly turn to her, Catherine, his true mate! Was it not well worth the trying for?—the risk? And where could there possibly be any wrong in what she would do? Would she not rather be righting a great injustice?

Her decision to act was not reached suddenly or impulsively. Long had it been fermenting and seething in her soul—until now, maddened by her unsatisfied hunger for the man, she was blind and deaf to every consideration which stood in the way of gaining him.

So long and so deeply had she thought of what she was now about to do, that her course lay clear before her. The first thing necessary was to send for Dr. Brooks.

He, thinking of course that he was summoned professionally, arrived at the LaFayette a few hours after he was sent for, at four o'clock in the afternoon.

When his name was brought up to their room, Mrs. Tyson was at once dispatched by her daughter to go calling, shopping, any thing—and not to reappear at their suite so long as the doctor's motor stood at the door of the hotel.

Much bewildered and somewhat troubled, the flustered lady obeyed, being much too fearful of Catherine's displeasure not to.

Dr. Brooks was received by Miss Tyson in the elegant little sitting-room of the choice suite they occupied at the

LaFayette. She had fitted the room up very tastefully with rugs, curtains and pictures of her own and it had a most inviting air.

She knew that Brooks disliked her. But that was of course merely because he realized her contempt for the poor-spirited creature with whom he had the bad taste to be infatuated. Should she, Catherine Tyson, take the trouble to exert herself to attract him, Joan of course could never hold her own against such a rival.

But Catherine had no wish to win him from Mrs. Randall. His manifest devotion to Joan served her purposes far too well.

"Ah, it is your mother, then, that is ill?" he asked as he shook hands with her, admitting to himself reluctantly that she was undoubtedly a very splendid looking woman in this wonderful gown of old rose crêpe which she wore.

"No one is ill," she said in her lazy drawl, as she smiled and sat down. "I sent for you to talk with you."

He looked at her in quick surprise, but sat down before her, holding his hat.

"If I had known that, I might have come later when I would have had more time than now," he said.

"I shall not detain you long. To come right to my point—you are, I believe, Dr. Brooks, acquainted with Mrs. Randall?"

"Acquainted with Mrs. Randall"? Oh, you mean with *Laura* Randall?"

"Of course."

"I know her, yes."

"Mrs. McCord intimated to me at one time that you and your father were violently in sympathy with her."

"A subject I can't of course discuss, you know—professional honor, and so forth."

"Certainly. But if you sympathize with her, you must think that she should have her son."

Brooks, not replying, waited for her to go on.

"And that her son would be better off with his own mother."

Brooks remained silent, looking at her steadily.

"I don't know whether you are aware that Judge Randall married his present wife only to have a care-taker for his boy."

"Indeed?" he said coldly.

"Only for that. If Bappis should be restored to his mother, Dr. Brooks, the reason for Mrs. Randall's presence in her husband's house would cease to exist. She could—go to the man who loves her."

She brought it out straight, looking at him challengingly.

But he met it unflinchingly, though his face and neck flamed red.

"Dr. Brooks, if you will bring Mrs. Laura Randall to Eastport next Friday, I shall undertake to get Bappis and give him to her."

"You could not; he is too closely guarded. The present Mrs. Randall is too utterly faithful to the trust her husband reposes in her."

"But if you will only promise to have Mrs. Randall here, I assure you I *shall* manage the rest of it."

"Inasmuch as you are not yearning to befriend Laura Randall whom I think you never met—who is it you are wanting to *injure*, Miss Tyson?"

"No one. I want Joan Randall out of the way. I want to make it possible for her to leave a husband who does not love her and go to one who does. Does that sound like injuring her?"

"Why do you want her out of the way?"

"Can't you guess? Haven't you seen?"

"Seen that Randall is your lover?"

"It is I," she said in a low passionate voice, "not Joan—that he loves!"

"You really mean that?"

"I have reason to mean it!"

He looked at her long and earnestly.

"You and I," she went on, "Judge Randall, Laura, Bappis and Joan—would each and all of us have what we want most in life, if you would bring Mrs. Randall next Friday to Eastport—to this hotel."

"Judge Randall wants you more than he wants Bappis? Then why didn't he turn Bappis over to his mother last summer and marry you instead of a—'care-taker' for his boy?"

"Do you believe for one moment that in his obstinate refusal to give up Bappis, he is actuated only by love for the boy and not in any least measure by resentment against Laura Randall?"

"Then you think his 'resentment' was a stronger emotion than his love for you? But I tell you *he* had no cause for resentment!" came from Brooks impetuously,

his eyes flashing the indignation he always found it difficult to professionally suppress when this subject was under discussion.

"Didn't he?" Catherine asked cautiously. She would have given the world to know the story of Randall's divorce.

But Brooks was instantly on his guard again.

"I am sure," he said, "that whatever Judge Randall's idiosyncrasies, he is too essentially a gentleman to take pleasure in *punishing*, by the slow torture of a defrauded motherhood, the woman who was once his beloved wife and who is his only son's mother!"

"Do you *justify* his keeping Bappis from her?"

"It is not my affair."

"Do you see any reason why you and I should not serve our own passionate needs through righting a wrong—giving back to a 'defrauded' mother her little son?"

He did not at once speak. She waited as, ponderingly, frowningly, he looked on the floor. The clock ticked loudly in the silent room—while little Bappis' fate hung in the balance.

At last he spoke.

"Miss Tyson, I will bring Mrs. Randall here, to your hotel, next Friday."

"I shall have Bappis here and will give him to his mother!"

"I do not believe," he said, looking white as he rose, "that you will have Bappis here. But I shall have Mrs. Randall here."

She, too, rose, her face flushed, her eyes brilliant, with the triumph of her success.

He feigned not to see the hand she extended in farewell, as abruptly he bade her good-afternoon and took his leave.

XI

It was two days later that Joan was called to the telephone to speak with Mrs. Tyson, Catherine taking the precaution to use her mother in order to avert suspicion of anything sinister or inimical.

"We want to take Bappis to the Trained Animal Show on Friday afternoon—Catherine and I," Mrs. Tyson explained, "if you will be so good as to let us, Mrs. Randall."

"That is very kind of you, Mrs. Tyson," came Joan's answer, "but I had planned to take him myself—I bought the tickets to-day. Thank you all the same—and I know Mr. Randall will appreciate your kindness."

"Oh! Well,—just hold the 'phone a minute, please——"

Joan heard the subdued murmuring of two voices for a minute at the other end of the line. Then again Mrs. Tyson spoke.

"But we are inviting a little party of children, Mrs. Randall,—Willie Sheldon and Jessie Allen—and a few others. Can't you let Bappis be one of the party?"

"It is most kind of you—but, my dear Mrs. Tyson, you *know* Bappis!—how he doesn't, unfortunately, mix very well with other children—your party will go much more smoothly without him! I really think you'd better count him out."

"We've already bought the tickets," Mrs. Tyson said tentatively.

"But you can so easily get another child in Bappis' place."

"To tell you the truth we were really getting up the little party for Bappis! And we should be so glad, dear Mrs. Randall, if you *could* arrange—you see dear Catherine——"

She stopped short and again an instant's murmured consultation came to Joan's waiting ear.

"Dear Catherine," she continued, "has given up an afternoon of bridge for this great event and *will* be so disappointed if Bappis can't come."

"I'm most sorry to disappoint you—but you probably know Mr. Randall's strict orders—Bappis goes nowhere without his nurse or me."

"But surely you can trust him with *us*, Mrs. Randall—such old friends of the family and——"

"Yes, yes, indeed, I'm only speaking of his father's orders."

"Well, then, *you* come with us, dear Mrs. Randall and——"

"Mama!" Joan heard in Catherine's peremptory voice—and then followed a third low-spoken consultation.

"Mrs. Randall," was Mrs. Tyson's next remark, "we shall be delighted to have *you* with us too."

"Oh, but I think you'd so much better just leave Bappis out of it, Mrs. Tyson—though I do thank you."

"Catherine is so set on having Bappis! I'm afraid we *can't* give it up. And of course it will only be an added pleasure to have *you* with us. Do say you'll come! Catherine is so earnest about this thing—I've never known

her to be—what, dearest?”—this last being evidently addressed to her daughter at her side; Joan wondered why Catherine, since she was manifestly dictating most of her mother’s remarks, did not come to the telephone herself.

“May we, then, have the great pleasure of having *you* with us, Mrs. Randall?” Mrs. Tyson, after a moment, continued.

“Well,” Joan very reluctantly yielded, “if you prefer putting up with me rather than doing without Bappis!”

“We certainly *do*, my dear! Very well, then, it is settled. We shall call for you both in our car at two on Friday.”

“I’m awfully sorry to thrust myself upon the party, Mrs. Tyson, but it is the only way I can let Bappis go.”

A driving rain on Friday made Joan hope that the party might be called off, for not only was she sure that Catherine did not want her, but she herself certainly did not enjoy the prospect of an afternoon in Miss Tyson’s company.

However, it cleared by noon, and she saw there was no escape.

She had casually mentioned the engagement to Judge Randall at breakfast.

“You are certainly faithful,” he had remarked, “to carry your guardianship to the extent of going to an animal show with Catherine Tyson! But really, it hardly seems necessary in this case that you should sacrifice yourself like that—the Tysons would of course see that Bappis—but no,” he changed his mind, “I suppose you would better be with him, Joan. Better not to risk anything.”

When at two o'clock the Tyson's big blue car stopped at the door, and Joan went out with Bappis, she was surprised to find Catherine alone.

"The others are waiting for us at the LaFayette," she explained.

A *tête-à-tête* between the two ladies might have been a bit of a strain, had not Bappis' chatter, on the short, rapid ride to the hotel, relieved the situation.

At the door of the LaFayette, they were joined by the two children, Willie Sheldon and Jessie Allen, and by a woman—a young and very elegant looking woman dressed in black, with a rather thick motoring veil about her face and neck.

Joan was instantly and peculiarly impressed by this woman—by her extraordinarily graceful walk and bearing as she led the children out to the car; by the dignity of her manner as she acknowledged Catherine's introduction to herself (Joan failed to catch her name in the clamor of the children's voices and the chugging of the car) and by an indefinite something in her demeanor—a stiffness, almost a rigidity, as though she were holding herself in with an effort. Was she timid, Joan wondered, about riding in a motor?

Mrs. Tyson was not of the party.

Catherine placed the two children, Willie and Jessie, on either side of Joan and drew Bappis down on the seat between her and the stranger. But he demurred, and insisted upon sitting beside Tante Joan.

Joan, who understood him well enough never to cross him unnecessarily, asked Willie Sheldon to change places

with him. She was not unaware of Catherine's cold disapproval of such indulgence of a whim. As for the lady in black, she sat strangely upright and silent, her eyes through her heavy veil seeming to fix themselves upon the seat opposite her, where Bappis sat beside his step-mother.

In the swift, breathless ride up the Avenue, to the theatre, Joan made one or two polite attempts to talk to the veiled stranger, but the woman, her gaze riveted upon Bappis, seemed scarcely to hear her—and Joan, deciding that she was probably a little deaf, gave up all effort to make her hear in the rushing speed at which they were riding.

In five minutes they were at the door of the theatre. The chauffeur kept his seat, his hands on the wheel, his foot on the clutch—but almost instantly Catherine was down upon the pavement, lifting out Willie and Jessie, and then, reaching past Bappis, she gave her hand to Joan.

As Joan's feet touched the pavement, the veiled woman clasped Bappis' arm to draw him back from the step of the car to her side. Catherine, at the same moment, gave a short, sharp command to the chauffeur—"Now!" she exclaimed—and the car started.

Joan turned about quickly—but she was too late—the motor was already off—bearing away Bappis with the stranger. Bewildered, she saw it turn the corner. Impulsively she dashed through the crowd about the theatre and reached the end of the block—only to see the car driving up the Avenue at a speed just escaping the menace of the law.

In a flash she knew, with an absolute certainty, that the veiled stranger was Bappis' mother.

White and trembling, she rushed back to Catherine—only to see her, with Willie and Jessie, swallowed up in the moving throng of women and children that were going into the theatre.

To plunge after her and demand the truth—no, no—what was the use of that? Not a moment must be lost—that car must be followed! What must she do first? was the frantic question of her heart. A taxicab? It could never overtake that flying car—and she would not even know in what direction to follow—nor, if she did overtake them, how to get Bappis back from his own mother!

She suddenly felt herself collapsing, physically and mentally. She clung to the electric post near which she stood to keep herself from sinking to the pavement.

When after a moment or two she had averted an impending faint, she tried to gather herself together—to think what she must do.

But the absolute finality of what had taken place was as far as her numbed thought would go. Mechanically she began to walk towards home, trying to realize this awful thing that had happened to her. Bappis' mother had taken him! There was nothing to be done. Nothing—but to go home and tell his father.

Her own world—the comfortable, happy world in which, for the past months, she had been blooming and flourishing—fell away from under her. She was again homeless and alone—Bappis gone and her home in which she had taken such pride, no longer her home. What

new world would now be hers she could not even ask herself—too crushing seemed this sudden smashing of her house of cards! For a house of cards it certainly had been—a husband only in appearance; a son not her own; a home of which she was not the mistress but the employed housekeeper. All, all false and destined from the beginning not to stand! How could it stand, built, as it had been, upon the tragic suffering of another woman! Should she ever forget, while she breathed, that black-robed, heavily-veiled figure seated before her in the motor—that mother holding herself rigidly from clasping to her breast the son whom for four years she had not seen! Joan found herself hoping fervently that Bappis would not add another wound to that lacerated soul by turning from her and demanding to be taken back to his Tante Joan! Yes, her own sense of undoing and even her dread of Judge Randall's pain and possible anger with her, paled before her deep and burning sympathy with the mother!

Well, her own work was over. All that remained for her to do, before packing her trunk and going to her mother, was the terribly painful ordeal of summoning Judge Randall home and telling him that the thing he had dreaded had happened—Bappis' mother, after four long years, held her little son once more in her arms.

That the situation left her suddenly free to go to the man who loved her did not, in this quivering hour, enter her mind or heart.

XII

It was not until Judge Randall, pale and stricken, turned upon her with the accusation that she had let this thing happen in order to free herself—in order to go to her lover!—that Joan for the first time wondered how it *had* come about and what had been Catherine Tyson's purpose in bringing it about. And immediately, with what seemed to her an almost uncanny divination, she saw the answer.

"It was Miss Tyson who wished to free me," she quietly affirmed to Randall.

"Miss Tyson! What motive could *she* have had for doing this? It was Dr. Brooks who had every reason for wishing to free you!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Joan, "he has had *nothing* to do with this!"

"We shall see!" Randall retorted, his intense, though controlled indignation and suffering manifest in what seemed to Joan the terrifying sternness of his face.

They were in the music-room—one of the four large rooms opening from the wide hall which ran through the house—and as Randall strode to the telephone in the rear of the hall, Joan heard him—as, white and still, she stood waiting—call up Dr. Brooks' office.

"Dr. Brooks, this is Randall," after a moment's waiting his deep voice spoke again. "Will you tell me, if you

know, whether it was Mrs. Randall—Laura Claiborne Randall—who took Bappis away to-day?”

A moment—and then, “Ah, I presume you know, then, *where* she has taken him?”

A brief pause—followed by Randall’s statement, “It was, I understand, you who managed this *coup*!”

Another pause—then again he spoke. “Exactly. So I have been led to understand. Well, you’ve done the job very thoroughly!”

Another long moment of silence at this end of the line, then Randall’s voice ironically once more.

“I must at least thank you for your frankness in admitting your questionably honorable part in it! Your motive was of course purely chivalrous!”

A moment later, the click of hanging up the receiver was followed by his returning steps to the music-room.

Joan drew back almost in consternation from the sombre pain of the eyes that met hers as he again joined her.

“It is not necessary,” he said quietly, but with a distant coldness, “for you to perjure yourself any further. Brooks admits his part.”

“His part! What part?” she breathlessly demanded.

“The part you and he planned he should play! Why should you keep up any farce about it? He *admits* his part, I have told you!”

“Dr. Brooks did not tell you I had any part in this, Judge Randall!—if you think he said so, you misunderstood him!”

“A gentleman doesn’t implicate his accomplice in his

dishonor when that accomplice happens to be a woman! No, he did not even mention your name."

"'Accomplice'! If he had anything to do with this, his accomplice was Catherine Tyson."

"And you. You who have so much to gain by it! Why are you too cowardly to acknowledge what you have done? Isn't it enough that you have traitorously betrayed your trust, without——"

"Don't say it, Judge Randall! You will be so sorry afterwards—when you know how mistaken you are! Call Dr. Brooks again and ask him whether I was his 'accomplice'?"

"He would of course acknowledge it!" Randall scoffed. "Do you *forget* that only a few days ago you told me how 'wrong' you felt it was to be keeping Bappis from his mother? 'Wrong'!" he mocked her. "Your highly original ideas of wrong!"

"You will not believe Dr. Brooks or me—then ask Miss Tyson! Or," she begged, beside herself and hardly knowing what she did say, "call up your wife—*wherever* she is—and ask her! You will believe *her*!"

"My wife?" he repeated with a lift of his brows.

"You would believe her?"

"The stab is that I cannot believe *you*—you who——"

He checked himself. He came and stood before her, gazing down into her white face.

"Tell me the truth—the *truth*!"

"I have not betrayed your trust! I had absolutely no least hint of this '*coup*' when Bappis and I got into Catherine Tyson's car! I had no idea who the woman was

who joined us at the LaFayette until she had disappeared with Bappis."

For a long moment their eyes met—then suddenly a light seemed to break through the blackness of Randall's countenance.

"Great God! Even losing Bappis was not worse than thinking for a moment that you—Joan—were treacherous to me!"

"You don't believe it now?" she pleaded.

"I was for the moment a fool, Joan!"

"Oh!" she drew a long, quivering breath.

"I know—simply know, somehow—that you would not have betrayed my trust in you!"

"I never, never would have!" she whispered, big tears in her eyes.

"And if you ever do go to Brooks"—he compressed his lips for an instant—"you'll not do it treacherously!"

"No!"

"It was Brooks and Catherine Tyson, then, who did this thing. It was Brooks who brought Laura to Eastport and took her to Catherine. Catherine managed the rest of it," he affirmed conclusively.

"I never dreamed that Dr. Brooks and Miss Tyson ever saw each other!"

"They probably did not. But—he wants you—and——"

"And Miss Tyson wants you! And as Dr. Brooks sympathizes very strongly with—with Mrs. Randall," said Joan, "I suppose he felt justified in doing this."

"He has told you he 'sympathized' with Mrs. Randall?"

"Yes."

"You and he talked of—that?"

"Two weeks ago he brought me a letter from Mrs. Randall in which she plead with me to give Bappis to her—and she—she wrote me the whole story!"

"The whole story?"

"Of her—trouble—with you."

"The whole story from *her* view of it! And you believe it all—as she told it?"

"I could not know you as I have since we have lived here together and not feel sure that there must be some other interpretation than the apparent one, of the circumstances she details!"

"Thank you for that, Joan!"

He turned from her and began pacing the floor in front of her. "So poor Laura appealed at last to *you*! God help her, how she has suffered if she could so humiliate herself!"

"Yes—she *has* suffered!"

He stopped again before her. "Ah, it was this letter, then, that made you so pensive of late? I see!—I see! And I had supposed Brooks was the cause of it!"

"It was the letter—I could hardly bear it!"

"And yet, Joan, I shall never rest until I've got back my boy!"

"Then you have some reason—some right—that even *she* does not know of—for you are not a selfish nor a cruel man!"

“You believe in me so thoroughly, Joan? And I for a moment stupidly doubted *you!* Joan, the time has come when you must hear this story of my divorce from my side of it!”

He motioned her to a chair by the window; and throwing himself into a deep arm-chair at right angles to her, he leaned back, crossed his legs, and in his deep, grave voice, began the narration of his story.

XIII

"At the time of our marriage Laura was, I am sure, the finest looking woman I have ever seen—with a soul built on the same noble lines, in some respects, as her beautiful person. She had a wonderful magnetism and charm, though by her very nobleness of mind, her spiritual dignity, she was a bit too awe-inspiring to win people closely and sympathetically—as *you* do," he suddenly added, contemplating his listener with what seemed to her a new light of understanding in his eyes. "For instance, I find it is somehow easy to me to talk to you to-night of this—to break the silence of years and tell you all about it! I wonder why!"

He looked at her as though at a loss to explain to himself the phenomenon he was realizing.

"Laura was not," he went on, "one to draw out other people's confidences, not even when one was so near to her as I was. She wouldn't have been interested in them. Her interests—especially her *human* interests—were exceedingly circumscribed. It was her utter sincerity, her fine and high sense of honor, her absolute purity, that raised her to a height above most people. But a height, you know, is nearly always a narrow point on which to stand, and I've observed that the wider view it affords is often lost in the loneliness of the elevation. Lofty people are seldom humanly sympathetic. Passionately as I worshipped her—and being a man of 'temperament,' as we

say, love was pretty much a life and death matter with me! —I was never close to her spiritually. It would be impossible to me, I think, ever to love in that way again—without the foundation of a comfortable, every-day comradeship. But Laura and I were about as greatly at variance in our attitude towards life as two people could well be. I was instinctively radical in my thought and feeling and had been liberally educated in the broader atmosphere of Europe, while she, naturally conservative, had been narrowly educated in a New York boarding-school. So we didn't see many things from the same angle. For a long time I strove very hard to find a ground of closer meeting with her. It seemed so essential to me that we should come together spiritually—essential not only to our happiness, but to the very integrity of our marriage. But she was so steeped in her prejudices, the prejudices of her class—than which, I verily believe, there are none more unconquerable—that I soon came to accept with resignation the fact that she never could understand the things which to me seemed so big and important in human life and in our development and that I must simply adjust myself to a wedded life of much inner solitude.

“Don't misunderstand me—we never quarrelled. Laura was too dignified and I too disinclined to force my convictions, my ideals, on any one not naturally in sympathy with them, and we were both too much in love with each other ever to quarrel.

“When, after a time, I came to avoid all discussion with her of those ideas and theories which she disliked, it only convinced her that I had become, through contact

with her greater common sense, less visionary and wrong-headed, and so her own complacency and happiness in her marriage increased in proportion as my self-withdrawal and loneliness became more definitely a thing to be reckoned with in my own consciousness. Some women are like that—just so blind to the real self of another who may be their nearest and dearest on earth!—strange as it may seem!

“The arrival of Bappis, however, seemed to go very far to compensating me for all the disappointment in our union which I constantly strove to conceal from Laura.

“But then came the second stage of our story.

“With the blindness of cold, unimaginative temperaments, she had the unwisdom to practically withdraw, after Bappis’ birth, from further marital relations with me. Not because she did not love me. She really deeply cared for me, she ‘esteemed’ me. But she reasoned with me—one child satisfied our hearts; she would be as much averse to sharing her affection for Bappis with another child as to sharing her affection for me with another husband; also, she wished to save her strength for nursing the boy; and inasmuch as we were not animals, but immortal souls, why should we ever descend to the plane of animals save to reproduce the race—and since we did not desire any more children——

“You see she was constitutionally incapable of knowing life; of knowing men.

“Well, I could have borne this—almost with relief—for being naturally sensitive to another’s ‘atmosphere’ (as she never was) my relations with her in every direction

had for a long time really been a strain. But I found that I still suffered, and probably always would, from the self-repression necessary where no real companionship existed, though I could see, as I said, that she herself was perfectly complacent as to the quality of our life together! And for that at least—*her* contentment—I could be thankful!

“Of course we differed utterly in our ideas about the boy’s rearing. Had we remained together, these differences of opinion would undoubtedly have caused some clashing, for Laura had never in her life known what it was to yield up her own will; to defer to a differing opinion; and I, on the other hand, while yielding every point to her that did not seem to me absolutely essential, was simply adamant where Bappis’ real welfare was concerned. As Bappis was only two years old when she—left us—there had of course been very few collisions of opinion between us—though she was always very much annoyed at my persistence in certain things of which she strongly disapproved—talking baby talk, calling him by nick-names and pet names; telling him fairy tales and teaching him to repeat Mother Goose rhymes. Common sense and absolute fidelity to Fact (which she erroneously called Truth) were the principles on which she stood. Of course I could not have my child’s development stunted by such cold-blooded tactics as these. I let her do as she pleased—I did not dictate to or criticise her. But I claimed an equal liberty for myself and *my* theories. In fact I tried to make up to Bappis for his mother’s blindness to the needs of a child.

“I think it was the strain of this unending effort at adjusting my life to a temperament so at odds with mine that made me, presently, succumb so readily to typhoid fever—and an extremely severe case of it I had.

“And now comes the episode of which I can tell you very little because I don’t know.

“My convalescence was very slow because my illness had been long; so long that the weakness of my heart and circulation left my brain unnourished with blood and I continued, for many months after the fever was all gone, to be a victim to delusions of all sorts—like the delusions of delirium; I can remember being at times entirely in doubt as to whether certain impressions were dreams or realities. And this uncertainty made me so sensitively reticent in the presence of the doctor that I think he was entirely misled as to my real condition. The nurse, it seems, for purposes of her own, did not let him know of my singularly prolonged mental cloudiness; so that he thought me restored to a perfectly normal state mentally, long before I was.

“This nurse, a pretty, sympathetic and intelligent young woman, seemed to me, as I clearly do recall, to give me, during this time, an understanding companionship such as I had never had with my wife. I was naturally affectionate and demonstrative, but I had always been discouraged by Laura from expressing, except in a formal way, at stated times, my very deep and strong feeling for her. But this nurse petted me. She understood and agreed with all my darling theories. She flattered the egotism that is two-thirds of every male creature! She

encouraged me to pour myself out to her. I had been starved and she fed me. In my weakness I clung to her. I adored her.

“When many weeks, perhaps months, later, I had come again into full possession of my powers, and the nurse had gone out of my life, I tried to realize what had happened—just what it was that had driven Laura away.

“I had a dreamy, awful memory of my wife’s having ordered Miss Dorsey out of the house and of my refusing to let her go; of Miss Dorsey’s astonishing refusal to go; of my having caressed the girl, doted on her!

“But what had been *her* idea—the nurse’s—in it all, I could not see. Had she been obsessed with an infatuation for a man half out of his mind, ill, and weak as a baby? It did not seem possible!

“I later found in my possession, among a lot of checks returned from my bank, several quite large amounts paid to Miss Dorsey. I had a hazy recollection of having been led to write them while my hand was so weak that it had to be held and guided. Perhaps *they*—the checks—had been the young woman’s idea in what she had done? I did not know.

“I turned at last to Laura. I tried to see her. She would not see me. I wrote to her. She sent my letters back unopened, demanding only that I send her our boy.

“At last she consented to let Sally talk to her. They had once been devoted friends and Sally had at first been almost as much outraged for Laura as Laura herself was. But Sally had incurred my wife’s deep and bitter resentment by having taken Bappis out of her reach at the time of

the clash here—Sally says she did so at my instigation, not really understanding the trouble. I don't remember anything about it, strange as that may seem! At any rate Sally *believed* my vindication of myself and consented to plead for me with Laura.

"She told her that *so far as I was aware*, my relations with the nurse had not been criminal; that I had not been in a normal mental state and did not clearly remember those first weeks of my convalescence; that if I had erred, the excuse I plead was my unaccountability and the long self-repression exacted of me. All this I had had to tell my sister——

"It was no use—Laura would not forgive or condone. I was a monstrous brute, a vicious, weak hypocrite, and she would never live with me again.

"For three long years we have waged the war over Bappis. I have stood ready, always, to compromise, to share him with his mother. But she, most unwisely, would never consent to that—would not consider it for a moment. It would have seemed to her like compromising with dishonor, with vice! For the boy's own sake she thought it her duty to get him absolutely away from my baleful influence!

"I in my turn have stood on my legal rights quite as much for my son's sake as for my own. I would not wrong him by giving him over to a narrow, prejudiced up-bringing; a rearing that, if he has aught of me in him, would cramp and dwarf his whole nature; I would not wrong him by depriving him of all that I can do for him which his mother cannot do; by condemning him to the bitterness

of believing his father to be a debased scoundrel! All this I'll spare him! With my last breath I'll spare him!

"It is not *I* that have made Laura suffer. It is her own blindness and pride which have been so much greater than her mother-love (and how great that mother-love is I know only too well!) as to have kept her away from her child when any hour in the past three years, until last August, she might have returned to him. But now her chance is gone. It is too late. She cannot return—but neither can she have Bappis!"

He paused. Joan, her face alive with her deep interest in his story, sat far back in her chair, her eyes fixed on him with a rapt fascination.

"And now," he abruptly questioned her, "what have you to say, Joan? Let me see it with your unprejudiced eyes—have I been right or wrong in keeping my boy from his mother?"

"Do you yourself have any doubts?"

"If ever I had had a doubt, Laura would have profited by it! Believe me, I have felt her suffering too keenly to have kept Bappis from her, if I had not believed I did right to keep him."

"You did not keep him from her!—she refused to come to him. So it looks to me."

"And the circumstances that led to all this—if you had been in Laura's place—would you, do you think, have felt it all to be so past condoning?"

"It seems to me I would have known you, have understood you, too well to—oh, suppose the worst she believes really did happen! You were not yourself. You were

ill! All I can say is that a woman like that is deeply to be pitied! I believe the worst suffering in this world is the sort that comes from our own blindness, from our own littleness! I do pity her for what she has suffered—and yet——”

She hesitated, a faint color coming into her face; but she added resolutely, “I would not, in your place, leave Bappis with her. It would, as you say, wrong him too much.”

“Though I have never doubted that, and though I have felt that it was not I, but herself, that separated her from Bappis, yet it comforts me, Joan, to hear what I have done justified—by you. I have seemed to myself at times very hard, even cruel, to Laura!”

“She has been harder, more cruel. That is why her suffering has been greater than yours. But—but oh!” she suddenly broke forth impetuously, breathlessly, the flush in her face deepening painfully, “you will think I am self-interested in taking your part—in encouraging your determination to get Bappis back!”

“‘Self-interested’?”

“So that I can stay on!”

“But since you don’t want to ‘stay on,’ how could you speak more *disinterestedly* than in ‘encouraging’ me to get Bappis back? For if Bappis did not come back——” He lifted his eyebrows questioningly.

His taking it for granted that in Bappis’ absence she had no place in this house, brought into Joan’s eyes a strained, almost tragic look which, in view of the facts, Randall scarcely knew how to interpret.

"However," he deliberately added, "as Bappis *will* come back, this episode, Joan, has not freed you."

"But until he comes back?" she asked with a wistfulness in which he read her longing for freedom.

"Until he comes? Well?"

"It might be a long time before you have him back. A year perhaps. So, until I am needed again, I could hardly stay here on your hands!"

"Needed? But it seems to me you've taught *me* to need you about as much as Bappis does! I'm just about as helpless! A man does like his comforts, you know, and a peaceful home with an atmosphere of kindness and sympathy. I am sure," he said with a gleam in his eyes as they rested upon her, "I have not realized, until brought face to face with the possibility of your abandoning me, how much you *have* made me need you! And now, of all times, with this other heavy trouble hanging over me!—Joan, don't you see what an ordeal it's going to be to me to have to tear Bappis away from his mother? It will require all the resolution I can summon! And I shall need you near me—*you*! Give me a little time, Joan, and I'll try presently to look at it from your side—unselfishly. But I can't give you up to Brooks yet!"

"You *want* me to stay on then?" she repeated, and instead of the despondency he looked for, the soft happiness that came into her face held him staring at her wonderingly.

"You are *glad* I want you to stay?" he asked incredulously.

"Oh! Yes!"

"You don't want to go away?"

"No!"

"To Brooks?"

She was silent for a moment, looking down at the hands in her lap.

"I want to stay here."

"Why?"

"This is the only home I have ever known! I have been so perfectly, deeply contented and happy here! I love it, I *love* this home!—and the bare prospect of being sent away from it, makes me realize that no other place can ever seem so truly home to me!"

"Joan," he answered, his voice sunk deep, "is it only stupid inability to understand you that makes you always appear to me such a bundle of inconsistencies and contradictions? I wish you would honor me with an explanation of yourself! I have given you to-night my own painful story. Tell me yours. You must know what I mean—the things in your unmarried life that made you appear in a false light; that made you seem what I am now so sure you were not!"

"I think," she slowly answered, "that deep in your heart, you never did think me just what I appeared to be—else I can't believe you would ever have trusted Bappis to me so completely as you have!"

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps instinctively I have——"

He checked himself abruptly, as though afraid to trust himself.

"Your story, Joan—tell it to me!"

Before she could answer, the sharp ringing of the telephone in the hall startled them both; Randall sprang up to answer it, but the butler was ahead of him. In tense expectancy they both waited, Randall not returning into the room, but standing in the doorway, his hand clutching the portiere; while Joan sat forward in her chair, clasping the arms of it to stay the jumping of her nerves.

XIV

"MISS TYSON, sir," Briscoe announced as he came from the telephone, "wants to speak to you."

"Ask her for her message—tell her I am engaged," was Randall's prompt answer; and turning to Joan as Briscoe went back, he added, "I couldn't trust myself—I'd use language not even lawful over a wire, let alone fitting from man to woman!"

Briscoe returned. "She would like you to come round to the LaFayette, sir, for an interview with her, she says."

"Answer that Mr. Randall is unable to oblige her," he directed, turning at once into the room and flinging himself again into his chair, his face white and harsh. Joan thought, as she looked at him, that though she had never, since she had known him, seen him other than kind to any one, it would be a quite dreadful experience to incur his anger. She had come very near to experiencing it herself to-night in his momentary distrust of her.

Briscoe again returned. "She says it's important, sir. She must see you and if she can't see you to-night, when and where can she?"

Randall sat upright. "Answer that I will see her here at my home when—*when she brings Bappis with her!* Tell her that—then hang up the receiver."

"Yes, sir."

They sat in silence while Briscoe delivered this message. Scarcely had he hung the receiver when a loud ring

at the front door was followed by the startling sound of quick, noisy little feet in the hall.

Randall and Joan—both suddenly rigid with the shock of it—clutched the arms of their chairs. The next moment Bappis himself rushed into the room.

With a cry Joan sprang to catch him as, dirty and dishevelled, he staggered towards her—but instantly realizing that in this moment his place was first in his father's arms, she stepped back and let Randall take him.

Sobbing and shivering, the child clung to his father, while Randall, speechless, held him close. For an instant no sound save the boy's hysterical crying broke the silence of that palpitating room.

But suddenly, wriggling around in his father's arms, he feebly called, "Tante Joan!"—and Randall, nodding to her to sit down, placed him in her lap.

It was then that they saw, for the first time, through the mud and mire that covered him, bruises and blood-stains on his face and hands; and at the same moment, Briscoe, appearing in the doorway, spoke to them.

"The man that brought Bappis is here in the hall, sir."

"Show him in."

The portiere was held aside and Randall went forward to meet the muddy-booted farmer who hesitatingly came into the room.

"I seen the little feller on the road," he explained, "on my way here fur to-morrow's market, and I picked him up and brung him along."

"I can never repay you!" Randall exclaimed as he motioned the man to a chair by the fire.

"I ain't after no *pay!*" the man protested, tentatively seating himself. "All I'm after is to make sure he's safe home with his own folks."

"Thanks to you, he is! Tell us, please, just how and when and where you found him."

"It was dark—near six o'clock—when I come on him trudgin' along in the mud. I pulled up and asked him where he was makin' fur, and he sayed he was goin' home to 'Tante Joan and Obber.' I didn't know no sich places and I asked him where they was at, and he sayed, 'In Eastport.' So I took him up then and tole him I'd bring him there. And then I seen he was hurt, and so on the way along he tole me how he was in a run-away automobile and it went so fast it upsot and throwed 'em all out in the road and that whilst the chaw-fur and a lady was bein' carried into a farm-house, he (this here little tyke, mind you!) cut and run to git back home. It was a straight road fur ten miles and he wouldn't have got lost, but he'd have froze in the road, I guess, if I or some other farmer comin' in fur market hadn't saw him. I asked him who the lady was that was along with him and got hurt, but he sayed he did not know her name—she was 'Miss Tyson's lady.' Then I asked him was his mammy and daddy livin' and he sayed no, but 'Obber and Tante Joan' was. 'Oh,' I says, 'them's folks, then, not places. What's their sek—male or female?'—you see I was seekin' a clue to where I was to fetch him—and he sayed they was *both*. So then I says—to git at a clue—'What's their names—

and *your* name?’ ‘Bappis Randall,’ he tole me. ‘Randall,’ I says. ‘Now it couldn’t be you was *Judge* Randall’s little boy!’ and when he says yes, he was, I most laughed—I thought he was puttin’ on! Fur you see, with all that there dirt and mud on hisself he does look tough, don’t he? But when he says his home was up here on the Avynoo where I knowed all the swells lived, then I begun to look up and take notice! It didn’t seem it could be I was haulin’ a tony kid like that in my old cart! But when I got here, your nigger he knowed him! Gollie, it had me beat when the nigger sayed yes, Judge Randall *is* the kid’s daddy! Well, Judge, this here’s certainly an honor—to have it to say I know you person’ly and have set and talked with you in your own settin’-room! I certainly won’t soon forgit this here trip!”

“Have you any idea,” Randall nervously inquired when he could get in a word, “about where the accident took place?”

“No, I hain’t exactly. But the little feller must have been walkin’ a long time, fur he tole me he’d passed the church with the Shanghai rooster on the steeple (a weather-vane it is) and that there’s way back nearer to Annapolis than Eastport.”

It was now nearly nine o’clock and Randall, issuing quick orders that the farmer should be given a hot supper and then be brought to him in the library, applied himself to discovering, with Joan’s help, whether Bappis had been seriously hurt. The child was too exhausted to be questioned, while together they undressed and washed him and put him to bed. A neighboring physician (not Brooks,

of course) was summoned to reassure them and to dress his very bad bruises, and when, after entirely relieving their anxiety, he departed, Bappis almost instantly fell asleep.

"I shall have to leave him with you now," Randall whispered to Joan outside the bed-room door, "while I go down and reward this farmer and then—and then, Joan, Laura has been hurt—I shall have to go in search of her—to learn where and how she is."

"Of course."

"I shall not return until I know."

"No."

"But if I am long away, of course you will hear from me."

"Don't worry about anything here."

He looked down at her and held out his hand. "Good-night, dear little faithful friend!"

But as he released her hand, and she turned back into the child's bed-room, another telephone call arrested them both.

"It may be news of her!"

He fairly leapt down stairs to the receiver.

So long he stopped below that Joan went back into Bappis' room to wait there until he should bring her what news he had.

When at last she again heard his step in the hall, she went out to meet him, that their voices might not disturb the sleeping child.

She saw at once that he looked pale and shocked.

Without speaking, he motioned her to a window-seat at one end of the hall, and they sat down together.

"The message was from the Annapolis hospital. She—Laura—and the chauffeur were both taken there. She—the doctor says she is fatally injured! An internal injury. Her mother and father are with her. They have—told her that she has only a short time—and so——" he spoke haltingly—"she asked them to 'phone and tell me that Bappis was missing. It was one of the doctors who telephoned, and I told him he could comfort her with the news that Bappis is here safe and well. I told him I would hold the line while he ascertained at once if possible whether it was her wish that I come to her and bring Bappis with me. The reply was that I should *send* Bappis to her."

"Oh!" Joan exclaimed, "are you sure——"

"What?"

"That it is not a *ruse* to get hold of Bappis again?"

"My God, I never thought of that!"

"You promised to send him?"

"Of course!"

"You will risk it?"

"What I can't risk is that she die without having him with her the few days that may be left to her!"

"Is there no way," Joan tremulously asked, "of avoiding *both* risks?"

"I think of a way, Joan. Since she forbids me (with her dying breath, poor, poor Laura!) to come to her,—*you* must go with Bappis."

"Oh, but if—if she is dying—to send *me* to her death-bed!"

"Bappis shall not go except in your care."

"If she refuses to see you, I can't think she is dying!"

"The ruling passion strong in death," he sadly repeated. "Her ruling passion has always been her pride. If she is very ill—and dying—she need not, you know, see you or know that you are there. It is only with you," he firmly repeated, "that I will trust Bappis away from me."

"Then I will take him."

"You will leave on the early morning train, Joan."

"Yes," she acquiesced.

"Thank you—thank you!"

A cry from the child's bed-room arrested them both.

"Tante Joan! Obber!"

They hurried to him—only to find that he had been dreaming and had called out in his sleep. He lay on his back, his arms spread wide, his head thrown back. Joan turned him over, smoothed the covers and drew them closer about him.

"I shall sleep with him to-night," she whispered. "He is restless and nervous—he's had such a shock! He may be waking in the night."

"Very well. Perhaps as you will have to start away so early in the morning, you'd better go to bed at once."

"Yes, I will; and you—you look so tired," she said solicitously, her eyes on his haggard, shocked face; "won't you go to bed, too, and try to rest?"

"No sleep for me to-night," he shook his head. "I feel as if I should never sleep again!"

"But you cannot blame yourself!"

"I am not such a sophist as to blame myself. But—she is so young, so good and fine—to go out like this! And she has, through me, been so wretchedly unhappy! It is all horrible—horrible, Joan!"

"Yes—I know!"

"But there!—I must not keep you. When you get to Annapolis, you will write to me promptly—of everything?"

"Of course."

"And summon me the moment you need me?"

"Yes."

"Good-night." He took her hand and raised it to his lips. Then, abruptly turning away, he left the room.

XV

A WEEK later, the long struggle between Arthur Randall and his divorced wife—a struggle which for him had been going on for three years before hers began and which, at the initiation of their joint siege, had found him already a spent and saddened man—ended in the death of Laura Randall at the Annapolis Hospital.

The whole tragic breach between them had been none the less pitiable because, from beginning to end, it had been the woman's own limitations of mind and spirit which had occasioned it; and no one had ever more keenly felt for her in her self-inflicted misery than the man whom she (stupidly, it must be said) had always believed to have ruthlessly imposed it upon her.

Her people being as anxious as she had always been to avoid newspaper notoriety, the automobile accident and subsequent death of one of the victims was not heralded with any hint of the true circumstances of the episode.

Thus closed a lamentable chapter in the life of a pair as ill-mated as blind Fate had ever brought together in "the holy bonds of wedlock."

After the funeral, just a day before Joan's return to Eastport with Bappis, Randall was summoned to New York to consult with his deceased wife's attorney concerning some details of his son's maternal inheritance; and before he was able to get back, Joan had been home a week.

A circumstance which met her on her return made her glad for the respite his absence gave her. She found, to her astonishment, that while she had been away, all her personal belongings had been removed from the room next to Bappis' nursery which she had occupied, to another part of the house—to the south bed-chamber of a suite of two rooms and a bath—the north bed-chamber of the suite being Randall's.

The discovery of this alteration naturally gave her a shock.

What did it mean? Their "compact" had so definitely precluded this——

Had he, then, meant only to wait for his divorced wife to die? But he had never supposed she was going to die this side of old age.

Never for a moment had he failed to respect, with utmost delicacy, the perfectly clear understanding between them. How, then, could she possibly regard this high-handed proceeding save as an unwarranted breach of contract? If she meekly acquiesced to it, as all her life she had let her career be moulded for her,—if, in a crisis like this, she did not assert herself—how could a man like Judge Randall help despising her?

It was an absent-minded companion that Bappis found in his Tante Joan in the next few days—a companion he regarded curiously, wonderingly, as she moved about with heightened color, dreamy, liquid eyes, and an oft-recurring trembling and quivering of the soft arms that held him and of the hands that ministered to him.

"What's the matter, Tante Joan?" he would demand.

"Why, what do you mean, Bappis? What is the matter?"

"You're—you're *different!*"

"How 'different'?"

"I don't know. You look funny! You don't play with me as much—and you don't talk. And when I talk, you don't answer until I nearly holler at you!"

"Oh, Bappis!" she smiled, "I'll take myself in hand. I'm—I'm just tired, I guess."

A long letter from Dr. Brooks, which came to her a few days after she reached home, served to distract her temporarily from the stinging thought of Randall's impending return.

The doctor's horror (as he wrote her) at the tragic outcome of his little plot in connection with Miss Tyson, quite overshadowed his chagrin in the consequent routing of his own purposes. Of course so long as there had been a prospect of Bappis being some day restored to his mother, so long had there seemed a chance of his ultimately claiming for his own the woman he loved, and who was so preposterously chained to a man who retained her, unloved, at his side solely for his own selfish domestic comfort and convenience. But now that Bappis was indeed motherless—through the vain connivance of two people who, for their own sakes even more than for that broken-hearted mother's, would have risked their lives to avert just this horrible contingency that had occurred—now, to be sure, he could scarcely hope that Fate would give him that which he so passionately coveted.

He ended his lengthy and impassioned writing by

begging Joan to answer, now, the question on which she had never yet satisfied him—how much did he really mean in her life? How much was he necessary to her happiness? What hope could she hold out to him who cared only for her? Did *she* care enough to run risks?—to break away from the unnatural, the monstrous union into which she had let herself be beguiled? Did she not recognize that the selfishness, the want of a high sense of honor, which had taken advantage of her youthful inexperience, of her homelessness, her unhappiness, was quite the same which had first outraged and insulted a wife in her very own home and then cruelly withheld from her, through many years, her little child? Could she go on living with this man, denying her own youth, her right to love, to *life*?

Joan lay awake, nights, pondering her reply to this letter; struggling to unravel the tangle of her own strange new emotions—her burning sense of many, many things that of late had dawned upon her horizon. She was confused, bewildered. She dreaded yet longed for Randall's return, that with his coming she might perhaps clear the haziness in which she found herself, get her bearings again, learn to know her own heart, which in her present perplexities was entirely mysterious to herself; as mysterious as, she was sure, it always had been to Arthur Randall.

XVI

THE business which had called Randall from home kept him away two weeks.

Joan's reception of him upon his return, her demeanor misleadingly serene and self-possessed, would certainly have given him no clue to the trembling of her soul before him, but for the burning brightness of the eyes with which she bravely met his as they clasped hands.

That the shadow of the recent tragedy hung heavily upon him was at once manifest to her in his subdued greeting, the sombreness of his voice and manner.

She had written him all the details of Laura's end; so, to their mutual relief they did not need to touch again upon that.

He reached home in the morning and the varied business that had accumulated in his absence kept him occupied all day; obtruded, indeed, even upon his half hour alone with her over their coffee in the library after dinner, a college President choosing that time to pay a postponed call to request him to address a congress of teachers, ministers and several varieties of callings involving education of one sort or another—upon the very live question of teaching religion in our public schools.

The college President courteously, though briefly, disposed of, Randall returned to his coffee, his pipe and Joan.

He had scarcely expected to find her still waiting for him, and the thrill with which he saw her sitting just

where he had left her, was almost an ecstasy to his sore and harassed soul.

Indeed, as he felt again, among other much stronger feelings, the soothing comfort of her sympathetic presence—after the bleakness of these recent days of her absence in which he had found his house, without her, as dreary as a vault—he realized the lifting of the shadow of death which so fearfully encompassed him.

“Gods, Joan, it’s good to see you here again! I couldn’t have got up courage to come home if you had not been here!”

“Fancy a thing of my puny size giving ‘courage’ to one of your dimensions!” she smiled as her eyes rested upon his substantial bulk lounging in his easy chair by the big library table, his pipe between his fingers, she sitting opposite him before the fire.

“It doesn’t happen to be a question of *avoirdufois*, however! Something a bit more subtle! What are *your* views, by the way, if you have any, on the subject of ‘teaching religion in our public schools’? I’m in for an address on the subject, if you please. I have some personal convictions on the matter, but they could be so briefly stated in two or three sentences that I don’t for the life of me see how I’m going to string them out into an ‘address.’”

“Of course this congress is all for the affirmative?”

“It’s avowed purpose is to discuss ways of making the teaching of religion a part of all education. President Loyd wants a special Department of Religion in *his* college.”

"Bryn Mawr, which surely stands for a pretty high ideal of culture and of womanhood," said Joan, "has no sort of religious service as part of its daily or weekly routine—and it seems to me that the entire freedom permitted to students to choose their own form of religious expression would lead to a higher, broader religious tone than any perfunctory service could induce."

"Go on!" he ordered her as he lazily smoked. "You will help me to thresh out my own ideas. Indian fashion, I'll let my wife do the heavy work while I smoke and take my ease."

"I do have some 'views' on this subject that I should like to flaunt!" she nodded, really welcoming a philosophic discussion which should give them a respite from personalities; which should, for a merciful moment, push to the background the vivid consciousness between them of that suite of rooms overhead, and her own trembling fear of the approaching hour when she would possibly be called upon to deny his unwarranted claim upon her and defend her individual freedom; while at the same time her perverse fancy viewed with a half-humorous scorn that precious commodity, her "individual freedom." What did she want with it? What—what?

"Don't you usually find that the most genuinely religious people you know," she gravely discoursed to him, "are those to whom religion is so wholly a matter of living that they have outgrown the necessity of making it a separate department requiring a temple and a deity?"

"What-ho! What have we here? *You'd* better address the congress!"

"I'd like the chance!" she said with a suddenly kindling countenance. "It seems to me a step backwards to introduce the teaching of religion as a *separate* thing into the public schools. Aren't you surely teaching religion when you teach history, literature, science, even geometry—*anything*? It's *all* religion, when taught by a religious individual, one who recognizes that what religion really means is a spirit of loving kindness; and that's *all* that it means essentially. The moment you try to reduce it to a formula or a department, you are in danger of a dogmatism which is and always has been death, ultimately, to real religion and to freedom of thought."

"All very true, my dear precocious young person! However, for children (of all ages) we must have kindergartens of religion—Sunday schools, churches, Altars, a 'personal God,' an inspired Book, even perhaps creeds. I agree with you, though, that I should hardly call any one mature who *required* these helps. The truth is, Joan," he said earnestly, "a new religion is emerging in the souls of men—the essence of which is that one cannot himself be healthy or happy unless the race is healthy and happy. Devotion to the welfare of the whole is the new Gospel—the expression of which we see—don't we?—in all the big reform movements of the day. And surely there's a divine element in it—calling for the highest self-abnegation! Look you how many among the privileged classes in all nations are now coming out from their long intellectual slavery to class prejudice, into the large freedom of recognizing principles of justice which must

inevitably make their own easy berths in life very insecure; could any religion be finer or nobler than that?"

"I foresee that your lecture before the congress will resolve itself into a talk on twentieth century Socialism!"

"It won't hurt them if it does. How is it, Joan," he suddenly demanded of her, "that in the ultra-conventional environment in which you've been reared, you should have come to such an extremely independent outlook upon life?"

Her eyes fell as she slowly, hesitatingly replied, "My real life has been lived so entirely within myself! In my solitude I've forged things out which perhaps I never should have thought of, if I had had a more natural, a happier girlhood."

"I, too," he gravely answered, "have never really been in harmony with my environment—have always been lonely. Do you know what it means to me, Joan, to have found a—a friend who is really such—who thinks and feels with me as I've come to realize you do? All my life those nearest my heart have been farthest from me in sympathy! In so far as I have been loved by my kin it has been not for what I am, but in spite of it. I've always longed for a companionship in which I could be myself without constraint. It seems very wonderful that I've actually found such companionship with you!"

"And there at Beechlands," she eagerly answered, "when every radical word you uttered found a warm response in me—I never could let you know what a sympathizer you had close by!"

"Why not?"

"Shyness. And fear of having my sympathy misinterpreted as I always knew my love for Bappis was!"

There was an instant's silence between them, he smoking, she looking down into the fire. Presently he took his pipe from his mouth and spoke quietly.

"Will you do me a favor to-night, Joan?"

She thought he must hear the violent thumping of her heart. She could not speak. He waited a moment, then added, "Talk to me of yourself. Why should you withhold anything from me? There is no least thing concerning you in which I am not—to put it mildly—interested. I venture to say there's not a mortal between the poles *more* interested in all that concerns you! You've never yet told me your story. May I hear it now—to-night? There surely *is* a story?"

"Scarcely a 'story,'" she answered, with a long, deep breath of relief at the postponement of what so palpitated between them; "you'll find it a very unromantic chronicle! No embellishments can make it anything else but commonplace and sordid!"

She stretched out a daintily-shod foot to the fender and contemplated it thoughtfully, as she related to him the story of her life.

XVII

"You probably know how my mother was reared—what a care-free, luxurious girlhood she had in her father's home; and how his death when she was eighteen and her unworldly marriage to a poor clergyman plunged her into a poverty she was wholly unfitted to cope with. So, when she was left a widow in frail health, with me on her hands, an infant, the one determination of her very inflexible will was that no matter what she did to prevent it, her daughter should never go through the humiliating poverty and drudgery to which *she* was forced; should never, while her mother breathed, work for her living; should always, at whatever cost to others (herself and her child included) be kept in the social world into which she had been born; marry in that world and so establish herself firmly in her proper place in life. It was through my marriage—a rich marriage into a good family—that I was to free my mother from her long enslavement to drudgery for my sake and free myself from my life-long necessary sponging upon friends and relatives. Once I was safely married, Mother would lie back and rest—or die in peace.

"That was the teaching of my whole childhood—the one ideal held up to me—an advantageous marriage. Mother had no ideals for me above station and money. Everything that was done for me, my entire education, made for that. The way she slaved for it, sacrificed her-

self for it, humiliated herself in the dust to get me invited constantly to the houses where she thought it an advantage for me to visit!—the passionate intensity with which she concentrated her whole mind upon bringing about her purpose no matter what she had to suffer in the process! I was swept along upon the current of her ambition into a life that was always so utterly alien to me (for never for an hour was I in sympathy with her purposes) that my real self was always submerged, never allowed to come to the fore, never found any sort of expression. Mother could not see how her course with me only served to defeat her own ends. I was ‘put out’ to charm as a cow is put out to pasture, and my very consciousness of it robbed me of all power to charm—stultified all natural thought and feeling, froze everything decent in me! Lives built upon such artificial foundations always are the dreariest failures! Why, if an eligible man so much as glanced my way, I at once became painfully sure that he saw right through me; *knew* I was meant for a bait; that the dainty frock I wore was the hook to my line; that I was a shameless Jezebel! So, of course I appeared self-conscious, stupid, uninteresting, a fool!

“I think I am naturally proud and I know I am sensitive, and my whole childhood and youth were clouded to blackness by what I saw my mother enduring for me; by my secret inner rebellion against it all; by my being forced upon people who didn’t care for me. How I’ve always envied people who were free *not* to truckle! Any one who was free to work and be self-respecting—servants,

shop-girls, chore-women!—I envied passionately—they could so justly scorn *me*!

“I’ve been so distorted out of all semblance to my real self that not only has no one known me as I am—I’ve scarcely known myself. For instance, my natural inclination always was to give myself—but I was taught to restrain all my impulses and consider only expediency: what I would get out of it, what return would be made to me—even in such small matters as the feeing of servants, the paying of a companion’s car-fare! It was never suggested to me to be kind and good because to be otherwise was in itself unbeautiful; was to be less than the best one is capable of becoming. Why, the first natural outlet I ever knew was my affection for Bappis! And when I found that he responded to my advances—how I let myself go, then, in my love for him!—and all the time I knew that every one thought it a pose to attract you! I thought you yourself must be suspicious of my motive in such extreme devotion as I gave to him!

“Of course the inevitable time had come in which I had openly rebelled against the career forced upon me; had refused to let my mother any longer slave for me, or to let myself be thrust as a barely tolerated visitor here and there and yonder. I rebelled most of all against my mother’s using her hard-earned pittances in buying finery for me far beyond what I had any right to dream of wearing and which I grew to *hate*! But oh!—the effect upon her of my rebellion! I can never forget it—it was so dreadful, so really frightful. She had sacrificed herself too long and too heavily to bear such a disappoint-

ment. I saw that I should simply kill her if I did what I so longed to do—drop the artificial and, to me, shameful life I led and get to work to support myself and her. So, I gave it up. I yielded myself—body, mind and soul—to realizing her ambition for me. Weak, you will call it. But I tell you that what appeared to every one who knew me, to be my contemptible want of spirit was my one strength—the strength it takes to sacrifice one's life to another. You can fancy what resolution it took to refuse your tempting offer to me to be Bappis' governess! No one will ever know what I went through in that! For I had begun to see how futile, after all, was my sacrifice and what an abject failure I should probably always be in the matrimonial market! And yet at the same time I knew it would be too bitterly hard upon Mother if I dared to accept the governess' position. She would not be able to see it rationally. Her long years of scheming, since my very babyhood, had obsessed her."

Joan paused for a moment, and Randall, looking at her meditatively, remarked, "And so, what appeared such inexplicable folly and—yes, weakness, want of character—was in reality a quite Spartan heroism—though I can't help thinking a mistaken heroism. (But we won't go into that.) What I want to say is—there is sometimes a greater strength required in yielding than in self-assertion, isn't there, Joan?"

"Oh, I realize I could have faced an army of grenadiers with less force of character than was demanded of me in yielding my will to my mother's! Well," she drew a long breath, "you understand now, don't you, why I was

so willing to marry you? Simply and solely for the sake of my worn-out mother! Oh! Your proposal of marriage opened up heaven to me! If you had been Satan himself I would have accepted you. And don't you see how, under the circumstances, I could so much more honorably accept you than if you had professed any love for me?"

"I see," he said slowly, looking at her strangely. "I see."

"It seemed to me, that night that you asked me to marry you, that even for Mother's sake I could not have accepted you if you had loved me; have used for my own selfish purposes a man's sincere feeling for me when I had no feeling to give him in return."

There was a moment's silence. Randall broke it abruptly; "But why didn't you long ago, Joan, explain all this to me—your relations with your mother—your bondage to her ambition for you? Why have you let me so misunderstand you?—cruelly sometimes!"

"So often I tried to tell you! But always the explanation seemed so like disloyalty to my mother. Indeed it has seemed so to-night—putting her in the light of a vulgar schemer; making her appear so monstrously horrible! To explain myself at all only seemed like trying to excuse my own weakness and lack of stamina in not insisting upon living my own life. But," she said with a long breath, "it was my pity and my affection that were strong—so much stronger than anything else in me! Why, my first thought when I read the story which your—which Mrs. Randall wrote to me," she faltered, "was relief that I had not known it in time to prevent my marrying you!"

For I knew that if I had had that letter beforehand, I never could have entered into a compact with you to keep her child from her! And that night after the Ridgeley's dinner, when you asked me why I had not 'produced' my scruples before our marriage, I wanted so much to tell you of the letter!—for secretly I was almost breaking my heart over it—and I did long so to hear your explanation, your defence of yourself. But I couldn't tell you—I was too afraid that a situation might develop in which you'd be obliged to scorn me if I did stay with you. And to leave you meant—you can see *what* it would have meant to my mother, who was resting at last—at last!—after her long, dreary struggle! Oh, I feared the thought of her worn face more than I feared my conscience, infinitely more than I pitied Bappis' mother! And so—I did not tell you of the letter. And—and here I still am! And that is all my 'story,' Judge Randall."

"Is it *only* your mother, Joan, that has kept you by me? Your mother, your affection for Bappis, your fear of outraged society—are these the only forces that have kept you from—Brooks?"

She turned white as silently she looked at him. She opened her lips, but her answer seemed to stick in her throat.

"Are these *now* all that keep you from him?"

"Aren't they *enough*?"

"Our compact, Joan, has turned out as my sister predicted—a failure. We can't go on with it."

"But why?" she breathlessly asked.

"I discovered something while you were gone; dis-

covered that my true home, my only home, is with you, Joan! I have grown to care for you too much."

The color began slowly to return to her white face; but she did not speak.

"Too much to stand in the way of your highest happiness. Far too much to go on living with you by the terms of our compact. I knew this, Joan, the night you came to me with your request that I let you—give yourself to another man!"

He paused, and after an instant added, "The time has come when I must release you—if you wish to be released."

"But I don't!"—the words seemed to fly from her lips.

"You don't love Brooks?"

"Unless gratified vanity is a form of love, no!"

"You *don't* love Brooks?"

He leaned towards her, his voice for the first time losing its steady self-restraint.

"I don't want to go away from you," she reiterated, "so long as you want me by you."

"But I don't want you 'by' me—I can't *have* you by me—unless you love me, Joan, as I love you!"

"Oh, but you don't love me!" she protested. "You only love—as you once said—your 'comforts.' Of course I know you *like* me—I would feel it if you didn't. And I have felt that you *do*. But it isn't love that you feel for me. You are only trying to persuade yourself that it is."

"Isn't it, Joan?—isn't it? Listen to me! It is through you—*you*—I have come to know that a love is possible which I once thought only an ideal dream!—love

that is something more than a passion on which one destroys oneself! A love that may be an abiding thing—not an ephemeral, feverish transport. A love that can transform all that is sordid into beauty and loveliness! A love that gets into the fibre and tissue of one's soul, Joan, and becomes such a vital part of one that to cut it out would mean inward bleeding! *That* is what (in the past few hard, hard weeks) I have come to realize you are to me!”

“But it can't be that I mean all that to you—I! Of course I have felt that I was coming to mean *something* to you. And oh!” she softly cried, “can you *imagine* what it has been to a bruised and battered thing such as I've been all my life to know myself needed, almost *necessary* to some one?”

“‘Bruised and battered’ all your life? It has not put you out of shape, by the Lord! Rather it has moulded you, child, into something so sweet and dear that the like of it I have not known among women! You have felt (you say) what you were coming to be to me! But I've held myself down too relentlessly for you to have felt more than the merest shadow of it!”

“And yet do you know——”

She hesitated, her eyes softening to a dreamy thoughtfulness. “It seems to me I realize now—to-night—that from the beginning I did know, in my inmost consciousness, of the first little change in you towards me. And after a time, just your presence in the house—your merely appearing in the doorway—would thrill me with the sense of your growing nearness to me! It was as though a

live nerve went from you to me, making me feel every beat of your heart towards me. And it was then, for the first time in my life, that I began——”

She stopped short, a deep color flooding her face.

“Yes?” he pressed, with a burning intentness upon her.

“That I began to know—without understanding *whither* I was drifting—I began to know what ecstasy means!”

Randall’s answer was to rise, go to her, take her bodily from her chair and fold her in his arms.

“Joan,” he spoke after a moment, “it was a far-seeing scheme of Fate’s—making me propose to you! Little did I dream I was asking my true mate to marry me! We’re going to be a happy brace, you and I! For we’re comrades, Joan—comrades by the ruling of the gods!”

He crushed her to him, kissing her, feeding his long-repressed hunger for her with an ardor of tenderness that made her indeed know ecstasy.

“But there’s just one thing——” She found breath at last to speak, bending back her head from his breast—
“One thing I’ve got to beg of you——”

“Command, not beg.”

“But seriously, I mean.”

“Yes, Joan?”

“I beg you *not* to idealize me. I couldn’t stand that.”

“No?” he smiled down into her upturned face.

“Because really you *must* understand—I’m so entirely commonplace and superficial—and in some ways really so flabby-weak—where my feelings interfere——”

"It is where your 'feelings interfere' that you are at your strongest, you know, you wholly feminine thing!—and that's the beauty of you—the womanly beauty, Joan!"

"But indeed, indeed, I refuse to be put on a pedestal. For I could not live up to it, you know. And it would bore me too awfully to try. If you can love me for just my ordinary self——"

"Since your 'ordinary self' is so far above most people's extraordinary——"

"Not at all," she anxiously protested. "By no means. I foresee you are simply destined to be disappointed in me—when you find me out!"

"Find you out, you funny child?"

"For a person not at all deep—with a strong inclination towards adventure and recklessness——"

"*You!*"

"Even me!—(or perhaps *I*.) You see, as I told you, my real self has never had a chance. But give it a chance and there's no telling to what lengths it may go in frivolity!"

He answered her with a long kiss. "What was it," he whispered, "that wrecked my other dream of happiness? Inhuman goodness, Joan—or what goes by that name. If you can manage to live down to me, dear darling, I'll try to live up to you—you sweet woman with the pure heart of a child but with a woman's fire! Come to me, come to me, Joan!"

XVIII

THE birth of Bappis' baby sister reconciled a reluctantly delighted Aunt Sally (whose longing for a daughter had never been fulfilled) for the thwarting of her matrimonial ambitions concerning her distinguished brother.

Bappis, who had felt himself injured enough, in all conscience, during the past months, by Obber's insisting upon Tante Joan's giving *him* some time, attention and devotion—a greedy share too—regarded the arrival of a baby sister as insult added to injury.

“I never *said* you should get me one! I never *wanted* her to be born!” he wildly protested.

But when one day his father suggested that they might send the little intruder away—give her to Aunt Sally to keep—he discovered that his sense of brotherly possession outweighed his masculine greed for Joan's undivided devotion, and his peremptory prohibition of such a proceeding was followed by a cheerful acceptance of the inevitable.

The baby girl came also with balm and softening to a worn-out grandmother, grown hard and joyless in her hideous struggles for vulgar and artificial ends.

But while the grandmother went to her grave convinced that her labors had been crowned with success beyond her dreams, the happy young mother resolved, as she held the lovely little baby head to her breast, that the ideals she would hold up to this woman-child through

all her life, should be ideals of service, not of gain; that her child's life should be grounded, not upon the shifting sands of worldliness, but upon the solid rock of nature.

"For in this way only can she ever know any real happiness," reflected Joan. "And in this way, no matter what befalls her, she can't miss some blessedness."

THE END

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